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COMING HOME TO ROOST BY GERALD GRANT.
IN TWO VOLUMES.

Vol. 1.

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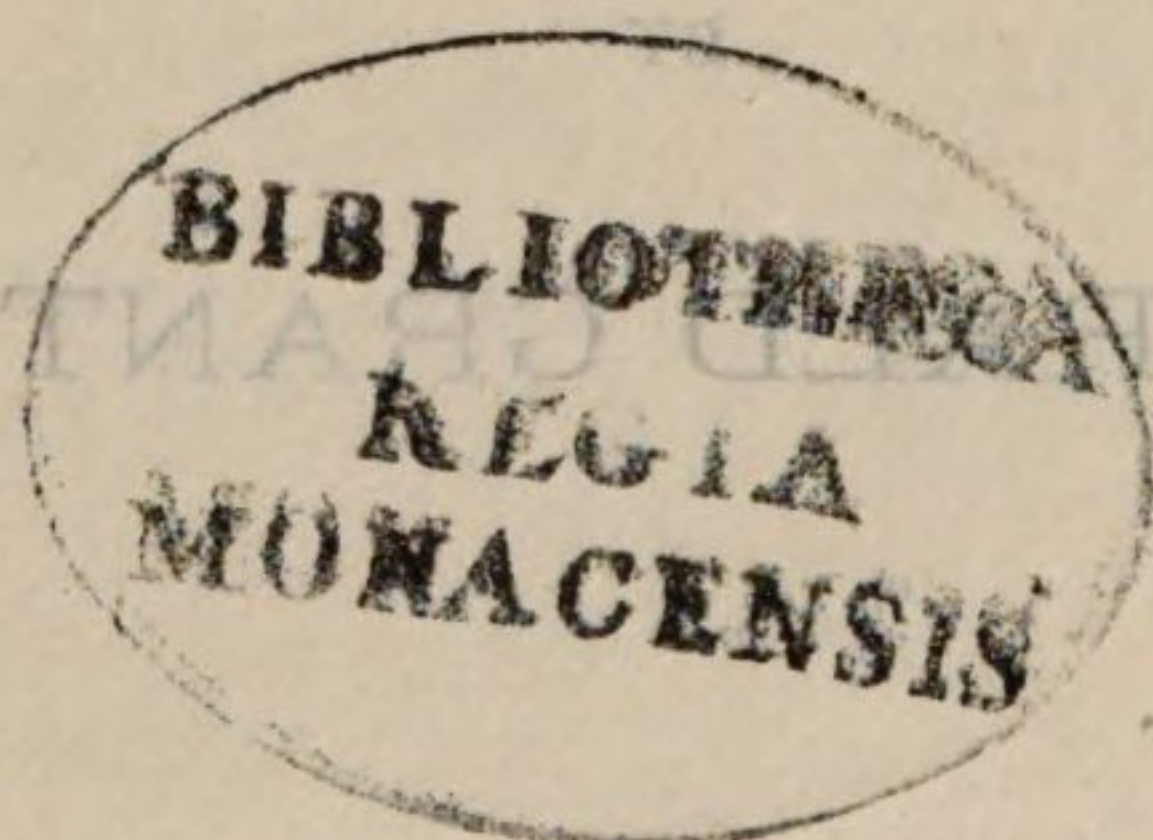
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Book A



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COMING HOME TO ROOST.

CHAPTER I.

"No, I am not now going to speak to you about God, or the mysteries of religion; I am not going to try and persuade you to believe what you will *not* believe, but I will speak of what will I know interest you all—of yourselves! You may reason away the existence of a God, a Saviour, a power of good and evil, but you cannot reason away the fact of your own existence. I know that stern, uncompromising truth is no longer the fashion; you like to have your ears tickled with something new; and yet the wise man said that there was nothing new under the sun, and I incline to his belief. I am quite aware of the vast importance you attach to your own powers of reasoning and penetration—you are all superior intellectual beings who have decided opinions upon everything whether within or beyond your comprehension; the former you very dexterously cut and alter until it fits your capacity, the latter you deny altogether—what you cannot understand, cannot exist! Now I am not going to dispute this; on the contrary, anxious to follow the fashion of the day and flatter your self-love, I mean to add to your title of *destroyer* that of *creator*. Yes!—every man, woman, and child, here present, is the creator of his own destiny—his life will be what he makes it: this he may not see at first, but he will see it clearly enough at last. And woe unto him

if he see it too late! It is only on looking back that he will recognise the vast importance of every action and every thought of his heart—I do not say to his eternal welfare—for as I said before, my subject for to-day is time, not eternity; but to himself as a living being capable, even in this his imperfect state, of so much happiness and suffering. It is a solemn and awe-inspiring thought how each of us holds in the hollow of his hand, not only his own fate, but that of others, who may lean on him as the weak lean on the strong. Oh! you who complain of a limited sphere of action, who would arraign the Almighty decree that did not make of you all gods, prophets, or heroes—do you at all comprehend the vast extent of power that the mere fact of existence gives you? if you did, you would tremble and not murmur—tremble for yourself, and those other lives so mysteriously linked with yours. I have so often thought of this; and only yesterday, as at eventide I watched the birds flying home to their nests, many of them with drooping wing, for they had come from far and were weary, I said to myself, so surely do our actions, sent forth for good or for evil—though borne away out of our sight upon the wings of time, and apparently lost to us for ever—come home at last to roost ”

“Beg pardon, Cyril, but like the old woman and her pig, I must get over the stile, or I shan’t get home to-night.” The Reverend Cyril Thornton, whose sermon had been an open-air one, his pulpit a stile, his congregation a clamorous party of rooks, and a world of small birds all chirping noisily as they claimed and settled down in their respective nests in the dark woods on the opposite side of the river—cut short the scarce-finished sentence, and turning round, put out his hand mechanically to help the intruder, a fresh, healthy-looking country girl, over the stile. “Ha, birdie, is that you?” he asked in a dreamy, absent tone, “why, where have you been?”

“To Longdon, about a dairy-maid. I thought, perhaps, that as we should have so few more walks together, you would accompany me;” then as a shade of annoyance

passed over the dreamer's face, she added, hastily, "Never mind, dear, I was only joking, you know; but it will be no joke if you are late again for tea, and I am going straight home now to make it—in half-an-hour it will be ready."

"And I shall be back."

"All right—" She turned to go, but a thought struck her: "By-the-bye, your sermon for to-morrow,—I suppose it is quite ready?"

"How ready?" you know I never mean to preach written sermons, I don't approve of them."

"No, dear, I know you don't, and you speak so beautifully, that I am sure you need not write down your thoughts; but just for the first time, do you not think some notes, at least, might be of use to you?"

"The preacher should need no help but that of the Spirit," was the calm, confident answer. "Only the simplest words would suit such a congregation as I address to-morrow."

"And because so simple, all the more difficult to address, at least I should think so; but of course you know best," as her companion impatiently knit his brows. "All Longdon is talking of you—the old men are as proud of you as if you were their own son." So saying, and without the aid of the proffered hand, she leaped the stile in true country-girl fashion, and went hurrying across the meadow, pausing now and then, however, to look back and even wave her hand. But neither look nor gesture met with any response. Cyril Thornton had returned to the stile and his inspirations.

The spell of the hour was upon him—the spell of the scene too. A thoroughly English picture it was, lying beneath the evening sky, so deep and far off, and over all a great stillness; not a stir in the air, not even the falling of a leaf, the bending of a bough; at his feet the river, hushed and shadowless, save when a soft fleecy cloud, rising imperceptibly, moved like the white hand of a woman over its bosom, hushing it into yet deeper quiet—then vanished as it rose. On one side of the river

stretched bright pasture meadows sloping gently down to the tall rushes, on the other a succession of dark hilly woods.

This was Cyril Thornton's favourite haunt; here he would linger away long hours of happy dreaming; here he poured forth his soul in passionate bursts of eloquence. Sometimes when the river flowed wild and wayward, overflowing its banks, and swollen by autumn rains, rushing on with no little noise and tumult, his voice like that of Demosthenes would rise high above the roar of the elements mingling with the howl of the wind as it moaned through the reeds, or shrieked like the cry of doomed souls over the dark Alton woods.

On this particular evening, however, nature touched a very different but equally responsive chord in his heart; it spoke of love, pure, exalted, infinite: the very air seemed to thrill as if in answer to some mighty voice, speaking not to the air, but the soul. With the great longing throbbing at his heart for the distant, the unattainable, thought sped onward and upward, and was soon lost in a fresh dream—not wholly of earth, not wholly of heaven, but a pleasant blending of the two. Hill, wood, and river vanish as by magic. He stands in the pulpit, raised, high above the eager, breathless crowd—the young, passionate, admired preacher, whose burning words compel attention. No nodding heads such as he had seen Sunday after Sunday at Alton and elsewhere—the infidel, the scoffer, the sceptic, *shall* hear—aye, and attend, if they will not obey—and enchanted by his eloquence, they shall be one hour at least at the foot of the cross. Ha!—has he prevailed? Proud heads bow low—soft, swimming eyes look up to him in silent reverence—the infidel forgets to smile, the scoffer to sneer—the preacher knows that he has bowed the hearts of that vast assembly as the heart of one man.

Dream on Cyril Thornton, and smile that grand, proud smile; we triumph best when we triumph only in fancy.

Having thus unceremoniously introduced the reader to Cyril Thornton, I would say a word about his family

and his home. Situated amid the fairest scenery, on the gentle slope of a hill, lies Manor Farm, a genuine old-fashioned English homestead; the house itself of red brick, massive and substantial, with its great courtyard at the back, in which watch-dogs of every size and breed bark almost incessantly by night and day. Beyond that is a little wood in which snowdrops, strawberries, nuts, and blackberries are alternately plentiful; and beyond that again stretch fine pasture meadows, extending, as we have before said, to the river—pastures, whose tender herbage, enriched by the heavy night dews rising from the water, gleams forth so cool and green that we are almost tempted, at least in summer, to envy the cattle browsing on the slopes, or herding together beneath the welcome shadow of some giant oak or chestnut; for the timber on Farmer Thornton's property is remarkably fine.

Bordering the house in front is a flower garden, small, but wonderfully productive, and sweet with the breath of many simple, well-known flowers, honeysuckle and roses—such roses! white, pink, and crimson,—wallflower and stocks, mignonette and carnations, and the pale, trailing jasmine. The best of it is, that as no one on the farm has time to attend much to them, they take care of themselves, and thrive in an almost miraculous manner.

Need we speak of the kitchen garden, which was one of the many prides of good Mrs. Thornton's simple heart. Of course she believed that no other wall, from Sussex to Northumberland, ripened such plums, peaches, pears, apricots, &c.; and we certainly will not wound her feelings by denying the fact.

There were many of Farmer Thornton's neighbours, of inferior social position to his own, who had their miniature carriage-drives, close-shaven lawns, and fashionable croquet grounds, but our farmer heartily despised all such feeble attempts at gentility; he had no carriage: why, then have a carriage-drive? and as to the rage for croquet, he looked upon it as a mild form of madness, harmless but incurable.

Yet he, too, had his pride. To see from his window, skirting, the upland meadow, the goodly range of hayricks, looking in the summer, with their white awnings, like some mimic encampment; to catch through the still morning air the merry click, click, of the water-mill, or inhale the pleasant steam of the brewery, sweeter to his nostrils than odours from Olympus, was for him a daily source of pride; and it was his only one. And yet his pedigree might have been envied, by many a new-made knight or even lord; for Manor Farm once—the Manor—had been the home of successive generations of Thorntons. Quiet, simple country gentlemen they all were—all but one, a certain Cyril Thornton, a slight, auburn-haired, deep-eyed youth, whose full-length portrait still hung over the mantelpiece in the hall, who had ventured boldly to step out of the family groove and enter the army. A dreamer, and somewhat of a poet, the life of towns was far more to his taste than the old place where the Thorntons from time immemorial had hunted, sported, and kept their heads above water; it was, therefore, completely deserted, while Captain Thornton lived a gay town life—writing verses and making sad havoc, no doubt, among the hearts of the romantic ladies of his time. Still the dignity of the Manor was kept up until, to add to his other follies, he married a proud court beauty. Then acre after acre of the rich productive land had to be sold—whatever could be turned into money was so turned; and sober people wondered what the Captain could be about to spend such sums: sober-minded people little know the reckless extravagance of a vain, selfish woman. Neither master nor mistress had been seen for years by the loyal but jealous tenantry, when one day the old family coach was seen lumbering along the high road. The news spread like wildfire; the Squire and his lady had returned to live among their own people; but it was not so: the Captain had come home alone—to die!

At first all was mystery, but by degrees floating rumours shaped themselves into an accusation—the fine

lady, for whom so many broad acres had been sold, having grown tired of her submissive slave, had left him. What to her was his broken heart, his ruined fortunes?—she was tired of him! For two years after his return, the Captain held his head high, going in and out among the tenants, who had been so long neglected. He also tried to put his affairs a little in order, but he was no man of business, and he had got into the hands of rogues. He never alluded to the disgrace that had fallen upon him; but as he died at the end of the two years, he was universally pronounced the victim of a broken heart;—such things were believed in in those days. On his breast was found the miniature of a beautiful woman, and a lock of wonderful hair, at least two yards long, according to tradition; but as no one knew anything about them, they were buried with him. So ended the only tragedy that ever darkened the annals of the Thornton family. But the fortunes of the family, and their social position changed from that time. The property went to a distant branch who, fortunately for them, had not been brought up in idleness. Under their careful management the heavy debts were by degrees paid off; but the acres once sold were lost for ever to the masters of Thornton, who ceased to be squires, degenerating into simple farmers. Their home, however, still retains some mementos of the position it once held in the county. Over the door, carved in stone, you may see the family shield and the date at which the house was built—in the sixteenth century. The common assembly-room, still dignified by the name of the hall, bears traces of the upper and lower salt, a stone step in the floor showing where the one ceased and the other began. This, together with the somewhat faded portrait over the mantelpiece, is all that is left to remind bluff Farmer Thornton of the former importance of his family, if, indeed, he ever cares to remember it!

A fine race of men those Thorntons were. The strange physical degeneracy so painfully apparent in some English families, that we wonder to what race of dwarfs succeed-

ing generations will reduce them, had not touched *them*; fine stalwart fellows they were, and are, with a certain rude nobility about them, to be ascribed rather to nature than birth. It was a goodly sight, on market days at Langdon, to see the farmer—tall, erect, broad shouldered, with his keen blue eyes and profusion of crisp, curling, iron-grey hair—a son on either side of him, both bearing a strong family likeness to himself and each other, though in all essential points they were totally dissimilar. Harry, the eldest, was an average common-place, young Englishman—more than ordinarily good-looking, perhaps, and clever enough on all farm matters, goodhearted and honourable, too, as were all the Thorntons. Cyril, though physically the same, was morally different—very different—and this altered altogether the character and expression of his face. Men of action all the Thorntons were; men of thought they were not. But Cyril from his boyhood had been a thinker, and was different, therefore, from his father and forefathers—unlike all, except that certain Cyril Thornton whose name and character had descended to him.

There was a strange resemblance, indeed, between the living and the dead—the same dreamy look in the eyes, and at times, in moments of gentler thought, the same tender, shadowy smile that the painter had caught and indelibly impressed upon the changeless features of the old portrait.

For years Cyril had lived to all outward appearance, at least, the ordinary life of the idle, mischievous school-boy; but his brain had been hard at work all the time, and sometimes, oppressed with a restless longing for he knew not what, he would wonder what made his soul feel so much too large for his body.

At least a mere chance, if indeed there be such a thing, decided the question for him. A mimic wedding, got up in honour of a birthday holiday, and celebrated in the great barn, when he was about fourteen years old, showed him the bent of his genius. Harry having been appointed bridegroom to a certain pert, florid young

damsel, by name Betsy Croaker, Cyril was unanimously elected to the priesthood, his clothes being in the best repair. A speech of course was called for amid much clapping of hands, and a speech he made in right good earnest—a speech that astonished both himself and his hearers; and it was in the faces of these hearers, rude, illiterate urchins, that he read his triumph—his first, and perhaps his greatest. He knew now what was his especial gift—it was eloquence; he knew also what his calling should be—that of a preacher!

From that day forth, from being the idlest of school-boys he became the most earnest of scholars—a preacher must know more than a farmer. He had now a glorious end in view, and for that end he would work. But poor Mrs. Thornton, who knew of no such end, was seriously alarmed at his usually good behaviour. He was no longer noisy or mischievous; he took to his books and did not play the truant at school. Such unnatural changes could but be the precursors of small-pox, scarlet fever, or decline; and many were the cruel doses her anxious mother's care inflicted upon him. As, however, no fatal malady declared itself, she grew resigned though with difficulty, to the change.

But Cyril had to contend with more than his mother's fears, and swallow what he found far more bitter than her physic—viz., his father's sarcastic taunts and dogged opposition. Though imbued with a proper respect for the clergy, to whom respectable members of society are indebted for their baptism, marriage rites, and Christian burial, he had no wish that a son of his should turn minister. There had never been such a thing in the Thornton family—why begin now! As to a heavenly calling and all that nonsense, let the lad obey his catechism, and do his duty in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call him: he'd find that hard enough, without aiming at anything higher.

How was it, then, that the stony-hearted father was won over at last?—for in due time Cyril did go to college and was duly ordained, and the day that follows

that on which our story opens, he is to preach his first sermon in Alton Church.

Here we must formally introduce the reader to a personage of no small importance in the family. I say introduce, for to bring a young lady for the first time under notice, leaping a stile and in anything but visiting trim, is hardly treating her with proper respect.

CHAPTER II.

ONE day, many years before the date of our story, just at the time of the gathering in of the harvest, when Farmer Thornton's presence was most needed upon his farm, he received a pressing summons to the death-bed of an old friend. No hope of advantage to himself would have taken him from home at such a time; but though in no way setting up for a philanthropist, he adhered strictly to the good old maxim that enjoins us to do as we would be done by; he therefore started at once, but only arrived in time to follow his friend to the grave as chief mourner. On the reading of the will, he found himself appointed guardian and sole trustee to the dead man's only child, a merry, healthy little maiden of five years; and sorely was the good farmer puzzled what to do with her: means she had, but where find her a proper home? The wife of a neighbouring farmer, a good, motherly sort of woman, who had no daughter of her own, offered to adopt the little orphan; but her husband drank; and her six sons were the black sheep of the place; that would not do. A spinster lady, too, daily haunted the house of that time—a spinster lady of undoubted respectability, strict principles, and very limited income, who shook her head unceasingly, sighed heavily, and expressing the deepest sympathy for the child's forlorn condition, offered to take charge of her in consideration of a remunerative sum, paid quarterly—in making which offer she was only of course actuated by the

purest feelings of benevolence. Farmer Thornton respected her principles, and believed in her philanthropy; but floating rumours accused her of starving her maid-servants, and the farmer declined her offer.

At last little Miss Mary, who had clung confidingly to his hand from the first, settled the matter in the quietest manner possible. Climbing up upon his knee, she wound her arms about his neck, and covering his face with kisses, nestled her little curly head upon his broad breast, and whispered softly—

“When will oo take me home—home wid oo! I want to see de big boys.”

Home with him! clever little Mary! He gave her a big bear’s hug, and his whole face beamed with delight. Home with him—why of course! that would settle all—how stupid of him not to have thought of it before!

Home they went together accordingly, and a line having prepared Mrs. Thornton for their arrival, she welcomed them, just as her husband knew she would. Standing in the rose covered porch, she received from his arms, into her own, the little stranger, who, worn out with the long days journey, had fallen fast asleep. One earnest look at the flushed face, one hearty mother’s kiss, and Mary was carried upstairs and laid in the small white bed so lovingly prepared for her.

After that, all things went on as usual at Manor Farm. Nothing was changed—nothing at least but Mrs. Thornton’s views upon one subject; for having no daughter of her own, and being the most conservative of women, thinking, moreover, that any dissatisfaction with her lot, expressed or even implied, would be a sin not only against God, but against the husband, who had blessed her with two such fine and noble lads, she had given it as her opinion, again and again reiterated, that girls were the greatest plagues, and that she, for her part, would rather have twenty sons to bring up than one daughter. But from the moment Mary’s dimpled arms encircled her neck, her opinion changed altogether. To deny that girls were veritable angels sent direct from

God, would have seemed like sacrilege, with that little innocent clinging to her hand, smiling up in her face, and calling her mother!

Yes, from the first, Mary had called her new protectors father and mother. She would also have called the boys brother, but this Mrs. Thornton would not allow, having her own secret hopes in a certain quarter, with which the too-familiar name of *brother* might materially interfere.

Meanwhile, year by year, nay, day by day, Mary's influence increased, until it became the ruling spirit of the whole house. Father, mother, and *cousins*, as she called Harry and Cyril, all leant in matters of importance upon her clear judgment and shrewd common sense; while her unruffled good temper and cheerful disposition made her presence welcome as a gleam of sunlight. The boys were both so fond of her that it was difficult to decide which liked her best, and quite impossible to decide to which *she* gave the preference. She certainly laughed and joked more with Hal, and the similarity of their tastes threw them more together; but in all times of excitement or danger, it was to Cyril's side she crept, and to his hand she clung—not, strange to say, to find help, but, if needs were, to give it. Also, for some reason inexplicable to herself, Cyril having once, in a moment of especial fondness, called her "Birdie," she never allowed another to call her by that name. The confidence of both brothers she had entirely, and it was to her, therefore, that Cyril had first entrusted his newborn hopes and aspirations. Quite ready to see him in the interesting light of a genius, she gave him every encouragement. For years they kept their own counsel: whenever they were alone he would fill her eager ear with his vast projects and brilliant illusions, sometimes even treating her to bursts of eloquence that literally took away her breath. Neither entertained the slightest fear of opposition—opposition indeed!—would not both parents rejoice to find thus in their younger born a ready-made genius! But, the farmer, far from showing

elation, showed only stubborn opposition. Mrs. Thornton, true to the wifely maxim, that whatever the husband does is right, was hardly as good an ally as she might have been, and Cyril was far too proud to urge his own cause. All this Mary saw, and boldly she came to the rescue. Never did rising barrister plead as she pleaded, returning again and again to the charge, in no way discouraged by the sharpest rebuffs; but Farmer Thornton was immovable. It is true, he could not bear to be at open war with his little favourite, or to see dark faces around his board; but the few prejudices he had were deeply rooted, and, moreover, he was too fond and proud of his farm, not to grudge every penny spent away from it, and the expenses of a college life he could not and would not meet. And yet, notwithstanding all this, Mary gained her point,—and how? Much in the same way she had gained it twelve years before. By putting her arms about the farmer's neck, and entreating him amid tears and kisses, and with many caressing, loving words, to allow her to devote to so great and noble an object the little fortune his careful management had already nearly doubled. "What would she ever want with the money?" Eloquently she pleaded, but not for long, for almost at the first words, the farmer pushed her roughly from him, asking her sternly whether it was Master Cyril who had put her up to this.

Her straightforward answer satisfied his pride, but rising abruptly he left the room, telling her that she was a silly child, who did not know what nonsense she was talking.

And yet this, poor Mary's last weapon, had struck home, aye and more surely than she ever dreamt of.

The next day, Cyril, half wild with delight, rushed into the kitchen, overturning, in his blind haste, a whole basketful of kittens, who set up a chorus of mews, and Mary hastening to the spot was caught up in his arms and overwhelmed with endearing epithets. His father had at last consented to his going to college; the path to fame and fortune lay clear before him, and, both attained,

Birdie should be his wife, and share fortune's favours with him. Words lightly spoken by the one, but believed in, and treasured up by the other, destined hereafter to gild many a foolish day-dream.

Let us now return to that particular evening spoken of in our last chapter. For evening has now fairly set in, and with it a clear sharp frost, which is creeping noiselessly over the face of the country. All the more welcome then is the ruddy glow of the great wood fire, which leaps forth to meet Farmer Thornton as he enters the hall—a rush of cold air coming in along with him. A thoroughly homelike, comfortable room the hall is, more especially when as now, the red firelight plays over the dark oak chimney-piece, the oak, wainscotings, and the long oak table, at one end of which sits Mary, presiding over a steaming urn, entirely engrossed in the all-important task of tea-making. At the other end stand two mighty tankards of foaming ale, the only beverage ever indulged in by the old and young farmer. Cyril alone showed a preference for Mary's tea; a taste that, his father laughingly declared, dubbed him curate at once.

"Holloa! where are the lads?—not in yet?" asked the farmer, as he strode leisurely up to the great arm-chair in the chimney corner, and stretched out his feet to the blaze.

Mrs. Thornton, knowing her husband's contempt for unpunctuality, hastened to make excuses for the boys. "You see, father, it's a long ride to M——; and when you go on business, there's no knowing to a moment when you can be back."

"And Cyril? He's had no long ride, I suppose? I wish, indeed, he had; I should be right glad to see him scouring the country, instead of mooning about the place till he's fit for nothing but a madhouse."

"A madhouse!—our Cyril? Oh, father!"

"Yes wife, a madhouse. Those geniuses, for all the fuss that's made about them, only differ from ordinary mortals by being so many degrees madder. A young

fellow gets his brain full of strange fancies which he can't make others understand, because he don't understand them himself. If in his madness he thinks himself the man in the moon, or the Trinity, or the Emperor of China, he's clapped into a madhouse. If, on the contrary, his madness expends itself in poetry, revival preachings, or anything else equally interesting, he's worshipped as a genius; and yet, where's the difference between him and the real madman, I should like to know? Both rave against the injustice of the world; both moon about, muttering and gesticulating; and both let their hair grow and forget to brush it; and as to their looks! why, I'm sure no maniac ever looked wilder than Cyril often does when I come upon him suddenly in the midst of his inspirations." Here the farmer, with a sly inward chuckle drained his tankard at a gulp, and called for his pipe.

Mary answered his knowing wink with a good humoured laugh; but though she could not altogether deny the truth of his words, she was coming boldly forward as the champion of geniuses in general, and theirs in particular, when poor Mrs. Thornton, who had been inexpressibly shocked at hearing her darling's name coupled with bedlam and insanity, now raised her voice in his defence. A very gentle and somewhat deprecating voice it was, and it amused rather than impressed the farmer.

"Oh, father, how can you talk so? I declare you don't deserve such a son as our Cyril. I don't say but that he may have studied too hard, which makes him seem wild and absent-like at times, but there never was madness in your family or mine either, at least, not since my great-uncle cut his throat, which was brought in temporary insanity for the credit of the family, but was all along of the drink and——"

But here Harry's voice was heard without, and pushing open the door with the butt-end of his whip, he appeared on the threshold bearing evident marks of the road, being literally splashed from head to foot.

"Well, lad?" asked the farmer, turning eagerly to his son.

"Well, father, it's all right. Jones consents to the exchange, and seems glad of it; but he'll talk it over with you himself next market-day."

"Well done!" exclaimed the farmer, rubbing his hands gleefully. "That bit of land will be everything to us—won't it, Hal?"

"Aye, aye; no doubt of that." But Harry's voice was less enthusiastic than it usually was when discussing farm matters, and as he spoke his eye glanced uneasily towards the sideboard, the general repository for letters, papers, &c.

"What are you looking for, Hal?" asked Mary, round the corners of whose lips lurked a mischievous smile.

"Oh, nothing—nothing. I was only looking for a clear space for my hat and whip."

"Well, lad, methinks you might find that anywhere without going out of your way to look for it. But come, drink down your ale; you must want it after your hard ride." And the farmer relit his pipe and prepared for a comfortable chat. But Hal seemed to find it hard to decide upon a suitable resting-place for his old battered wide-awake, for he still stood at the sideboard, noisily tossing over everything that lay on it.

"Has no letter or note come for me to-day?" he asked at last; and Mary, who was furtively watching him, though she could not see his face, saw the nape of his neck, and knew by the unusually vivid hue that he was blushing violently.

"Letter or note!" she repeated, innocently. "I did not know, Hal, that you were expecting one?"

"Oh no, of course not—that is to say, I thought perhaps that Joe Sparkes might write about that horse he wanted me to buy; but you say there's *no* note or message of *any* kind, eh?"

But Mary's attention was apparently engrossed in the teapot, and she did not answer.

Poor Hal gave vent to his feelings in an exclamation, half grunt, half sigh, and subsided into the arm-chair

opposite his father, but his broad, good-humoured face wore so blank and woe-begone an expression that Mary soon came to the rescue.

"Come, Hal, let's go and look for Cyril. Perhaps he's been caught up to the seventh heaven, and only left his mantle behind."

Hal jumped up impetuously, glad of any pretext to get out of the room. When fairly in the garden, Mary observed in a careless tone,—

"A note did come for you to-day, Hal, but as it isn't from *Joe*, it can't be the one you were expecting."

"Oh, bother Sparkes! Where's the note? Is it from *her*, Polly? Quick—give it me, do, there's a good girl."

Mary drew a dainty little three-cornered note from her pocket. Hal snatched it eagerly from her.

"You can't read it here, Hal; let's come into the kitchen, no one's there."

No one was there, as she had said, they had it all to themselves; and standing on the hearth, Hal read his note by the red light of the monster fire. Mary saw his handsome face flush and kindle.

"Well, Hal?"

"Polly, she's an angel, and that I should ever have thought her proud, and feared to speak out my mind to her! She asks me to go and see her, and I take that for a good sign, don't you, Polly? You see, she could so easily have refused me on paper."

"*Refused* you, Hal; you did not tell me that you had proposed to Miss Drugh." Mary looked anxious and troubled.

"Well, the fact is Polly, I can't bear suspense; and when you like a girl, and want to make her your wife, my idea is that the sooner you tell her so the better; and as she said she shouldn't be amongst us for long, I thought that the sooner I spoke out my mind the pleasanter it would be for both parties."

"And father knows nothing about it?"

"How could I make a fool of myself and her, and

go prating about it when I didn't even know whether Miss Drugh would have anything to say to me? but if she will, why of course I shall tell father all."

"God bless you, Hal," said Mary, earnestly; but as she spoke, she sighed. There had never been any sympathy between her and the strange dark-eyed girl who, three months before, had come amongst them, nobody knew from whence; and now a great doubt arose in her mind whether she would ever make the happiness of good rough honest Hal, who himself seemed in no way troubled with doubts, and his face was bright as a June day, as he said in a tone of no little importance, "Well, good-bye, Polly, I must be off; you see she says as *soon as possible*. I say, Polly, isn't she a fine girl? And what eyes she has! and what a voice! there's not another like her in these parts—that there ain't. But where's my hat? By Jove, I left it in the hall—so I did. Run and fetch it, there's a good girl."

"Why, Hal, you are never going just as you are?"

"Why not? What's the matter now?"

"Why, simply that you're splashed from head to foot."

"Am I?" Poor Hal looked ruefully down at his bespattered garments.

"Oh, it isn't only your coat; the mud hasn't even respected your face, and you've *such* a splash on your nose, which doesn't look at all sentimental, I assure you,—that would spoil all!"

"Would it?" said poor Hal, innocently; "well, you know more about women than I do." And he raised his hand to his face to ascertain for himself whether the said splash was a cruel fact or merely a cruel libel. "I'll just go to the pump and give myself a wash."

"And your boots, Hal,—whatever would Miss Drugh think of such boots; and your coat and——"

But Master Hal turned restive. "Oh, bother all that. I'm not going to sport my Sunday black just because I ask a girl to be my wife; if she'll have me, it's for myself I hope, and not for my coat——"

"Oh yes, dear, of course, but Miss Drugh's very particular, I'm sure; she told me the other day that handsome men and women should know how to make the most of their gifts."

"What bosh you girls do talk; it wasn't of *me* Miss Drugh was thinking, I bet, when she said that, but of some fine London sweetheart. She never said she thought *me* handsome, now did she, Polly?"

The question was put in a tone of careless indifference, but Hal looked sheepish and blushed like a girl.

"Yes, she did. It was last Tuesday, when she came for eggs, and you found her here on your return from market. She watched you out of the gate, and then she said quite openly that you were a very handsome young fellow, the best specimen she had ever seen of an honest English farmer. Yes, I quite remember its being market day, for I noticed you had on your *dark shooting* jacket, your *new wide-awake*, and the blue tie Cyril brought you from Oxford."

"Oh, rubbish! It's all very well for a fine gentleman like Cy to sport spanking ties and lavender kids, and patent boots, but I'm not the fellow for all that sort of thing; I'm a plain farmer, neither more nor less, and this Miss Drugh may as well know now as later."

He spoke in a tone of lofty contempt; nevertheless, when ten minutes afterwards, Mary, stationed at an upper window, saw the bold wooer emerge from under the shadow of the porch, and glide like some midnight robber along the sheltering wall, she caught sight of something very like a dark shooting jacket, a new wide-awake, and a blue tie!

CHAPTER III.

"HAS any one called—has any note or message been left for me?"

"No, ma'am."

Miss Drugh took off her hat and flung into it the handful of violets she had that afternoon gathered; then stirred the fire into a brighter blaze, and walked to the window.

"Shall I light the lamp, ma'am?"

"The lamp—oh no, thank you, I like the twilight. I will light it myself when I want it."

The landlady left the room, and Caroline turned once more to the window and watched how the evening shadows stole along the garden wall, dark and noiseless as spirits of the night taking silent possession of the earth. How still was all without—how calm! She pressed her forehead to the cold glass and sighed.

Brisk steps were heard along the lane—the crisp frosty ground making them distinctly audible; the garden gate was impetuously opened, and Harry Thornton's voice was heard asking for Miss Drugh. Not the faintest flush or change of countenance betrayed either emotion or agitation as she left her post, and the thoughts that passed through her mind were hardly those of a young lady awaiting a handsome lover.

"He's come, of course; I knew he would; well, it will soon be decided now, one way or the other; poor fellow, it's hard upon him—really hard upon him, but it can't be helped, it's better—far better that my fate should thus be taken out of my own hands."

When Harry, hot, eager, breathless, appeared in the door-way, he saw Miss Drugh standing grave and composed on the hearth-rug, in the full blaze of the firelight, which played fitfully over her pale statuesque features. It was the first time he had seen her in her own home; they had met at the Christmas school feasts, at the rectory, at church, at the farm, and oftener still in the fields and lanes; but he had never before seen her at her own fireside, and the novelty of the position disconcerted him.

She held out her hand, but he was too flurried to take

it; she noticed his embarrassment and spoke first, "You got my note, Mr. Thornton?"

"Oh, yes; so grateful, so proud. I hope you did not expect me before—I mean that I should have come before, at once, of course, only father sent me to M—— on business." Here he paused, not having another word at his command. Again and again he cursed himself for a fool, and wondered what Miss Drugh would think of him. He would at that moment have given ten years of his life to possess only a spark of his brother's eloquence. Not that he had ever wanted for words when flirting with Dolly James or Bessy Croaker; what, then, made him feel so awkward now that he stood face to face with the only girl he had ever loved?—the girl around whom the sweet winter odours seemed to gather, for a large bunch of the freshly-culled violets nestled in the bosom of her dress, and the rest lay on a chair beside her—the girl with the cold, self-possessed manner and dark expressive face, so unlike the generality of faces that meet you on the high road of life, and which had fascinated him from the hour he had first looked upon it, now three months ago. There was a long, a terrible pause; poor Hal heard the beatings of his heart, which went far in advance of the great silver watch, whose loud tick was audible through the room. He must speak!—and on he dashed impetuously, letting his thoughts tumble out one after another as best they might.

"I was so afraid you would think me presumptuous for writing as I did; but you said you would soon be leaving us, and I couldn't let you go without speaking out my mind; and I knew that things couldn't go on in the old way, when my head was quite full of you; and instead of attending to the work on the farm, I was always wandering about in the hope of catching a sight of you, and often—but where's the use of telling you all this?—you know it just as well as I do—and so I thought it had better be settled one way or the other—that is—I mean—the *right* way, of course. For if

you care for me only half as much as I do for you, I don't see that there's anything to wait for."

Here he paused once more, partly for breath, partly for a word of encouragement. The former he got—the latter not; Miss Drugh only raising one moment to his face the deep speculative eyes that seemed to gaze beyond him, and the actual meaning of his words, at some probable contingency that yet lay afar off.

"Oh! Miss Drugh," blundered on her agitated lover, "I know that you are infinitely superior to me and my people, but if you would look favourably upon me, my one thought would be to make you happy—it would, indeed. I am my own master, you know, for father gives me, when I marry, the farm upon the hill that you admired the other day. It's a little out of the way, it's true, but you need never want for company, for mother would be always in and out, and Polly—Mary, I mean—would be a sister to you; and I can give you as good a horse to ride as any lady in the county, for I reared Wildrose myself, and she is a beauty! and as quiet as a lamb. And you could ride in to Langdon on market days—there's a circulating library there—and if you like poetry [Miss Betsy Croaker had told Hal that all young ladies adored poetry], why I've some of my own that I got as prizes, for I was a pretty sharp scholar, though I dare say I seem a slow fellow enough to you. I don't care for such things myself, but mother keeps them wrapped up in silver paper, and they cost a power of money, at least so father says—in the bill! And I *should* be proud to see them on *your* table," added the poor fellow humbly. Then, as his somewhat dull fancy caught the distant light of that home life which most men—the young ones especially—dream of as an Eden until they find themselves sole and undisputed owners of wife and children, sole payer of rent, taxes, and household bills, when their opinion is apt to alter materially,—as he caught this light, I say, his soul kindled within him, and he exclaimed almost with enthu-

siasm, "Oh Miss Drugh, I think we should be so happy together, if only you would look kindly upon me!"

A faint smile flitted one moment over Caroline's face; not the bright, dimpling smile that beautifies the plainest countenance, but rather the reflection of some half-sad, half-mocking thought, that passed over the pale features as the silver cloud passes over the face of the moon and obscures its light; for Caroline Drugh's face, of a melancholy cast at all times, was never more so than when she smiled.

In an agony of suspense Harry awaited her answer, nervously twisting his wide-awake into all impossible shapes, and wondering uneasily, why she seemed so immeasurably distant from him, now that one word only might give her to him for life. And that word *must* be spoken, for having set all plainly before her he had not another word to add; could not have added another had his life depended upon it. This, Miss Drugh seemed at last to realise, for raising her eyes slowly to his, she said quietly—

"I will be your wife, if you will have me."

"Oh, thank you!" Harry sprang forward, but something in the girl's face arrested him—he stopped short.

"Yes; I will be your wife, if you will have me," she repeated; "but if I know anything of Harry Thornton and the class to which he belongs, you will judge differently when you have heard all I have to tell."

"Oh, Miss Drugh! nothing you can say would alter"—but another look silenced him.

"Do not interrupt me, Mr. Thornton—I ask it as a favour; only hear all I have to say and you can then give me your answer, as I gave you mine. I shall not detain you long; but will you not sit down? you must be tired after your long ride. No? Well, then, I am." And with an impatient sigh she pushed the dainty little hat off the low chair, scattering its wealth of faint-scented violets and moist leaves over the floor, and moving the chair further back from the red hearth glow into the shrouding twilight shadows, sank down into it.

"Whatever you may think of my confidence," she began, "you are the first to whom it has ever been offered; perhaps it is foolish of me to act as I am doing. Many a girl circumstanced as I am, would share your home, and accept you all the more readily for the terrible secret that, if revealed, would make her an alien and an outcast. But I honour your noble old father and simple-hearted mother, perhaps, too," she added, while the deepening shadows hid the paling of her lip, "*I am too proud* to act thus dishonourably. Though a comparative stranger to you, you have unhesitatingly put your happiness into my hands. I respect you for it, and in return I offer you my confidence, which will, I know, be as safe with you as it has been with me, all these long years!—for it is an old story, too old to be any longer interesting to the public, though, at the time, the public papers and public mind were full of it. Twelve years ago, then, Dr. Westhorpe, who for thirty years had lived a high, honourable life, so much respected and beloved by those who shared his purse and feasted at his table—and who did not!—was taken up for the murder of his oldest and one of his richest patients, whose miserable existence hung from day to day on the extraordinary skill of his physician, but who at last died rather suddenly. What so natural! a prey to disease of every kind, who could suspect foul play? His heirs did not. The two London physicians telegraphed for by Dr. Westhorpe did not—even the lawyers who knew of a legacy of 5000*l.* did not."

Caroline paused; she had hitherto spoken with rapid bitterness, but when she resumed it was in low clear tones, every word falling from her lips with startling distinctness.

"But Dr. Westhorpe had an assistant whom he had treated as a son, ever since the day that, as a footsore, penniless boy, he had knocked one night at his door—a homeless, friendless wanderer, whom chance had sent to our large manufacturing town. From that day the wretched outcast had a home, an instructor, a friend—

more than a friend—a father! Have you heard the story of the viper, warmed on the poor man's hearth and sheltered in his bosom, Mr. Thornton? No! then the world has still much to teach you. Dr. Westhorpe was accused of the murder of the old miser, who had left him a legacy of 5000*l.* and his accuser was the man who had called him—father! Yes, he it was who betrayed him. He it was who stood calmly forth and swore away the life of his benefactor. Dr. Westhorpe was found guilty—and the gibbet was erected—and Dr. Westhorpe was my father!”

As she uttered the last words, an involuntary exclamation of horror broke from Harry Thornton's lips. Poor Hal—vain had been all his endeavours to grasp the meaning of the foregoing words. What had vipers, or the notorious criminal Dr. Westhorpe to do with him and his sweetheart? All the greater then was his horror when the fatal words, with their full, ghastly meaning broke upon him. Brought up in the country, among simple jog-trot people, crime was to him an anomaly—a thing too hideous to be realised—and that the girl he loved should be the daughter of a criminal, an executed murderer, seemed like some frightful nightmare, that for the time paralysed every faculty, even that of thought. A mist gathered before his eyes, but through that mist, as in a dream, he saw Caroline Drugh rise slowly from her seat, and advance to within a few steps of him, standing once more in the full blaze of the firelight, dark, stormy passions gleaming forth with unholy light from her eyes,—and faint and distant as the soft voice of some mocking fiend, he heard the words once more repeated, “I will be your wife, Mr. Thornton, if you will have me.”

There was a long silence—then the low, quiet voice, began once more. “In your face I read your answer. You have decided, as I knew you would, and you have decided for the best—as I should have implored you to decide had I been your sister. Your name is honourable, your life peaceful. Keep it so, Mr. Thornton, and thank

God for the escape you have had; for if the possession of my poor secret but for one moment, has so unmanned you, how could you bear it about with you through life! Perhaps your father's blessing or your mother's prayers have saved you from the trial, Good-bye."

Overcome by conflicting emotions, Harry had sunk into a chair and covered his face with his hands; but at the last word he sprang up, and stammered out in a broken voice, "Oh, Miss Drugh; have pity on me! It is all so strange, so dreadful! Only give me time to think; let me see you again to—morrow."

"Good-bye," repeated Caroline, softly, and the music of her voice with its wild, melancholy ring, struck cold to his heart, like the toll of the death knell.

Just then the click of the garden gate was heard. "It is Mr. Winsmore," said Miss Drugh, quietly; "I expected him this evening."

Harry threw a despairing look around, seized his wide-awake, which had fallen upon the ground, and beat a precipitate retreat through the French window. Not once did he pause, even for breath, until he reached Beckham Bridge. There, coming to a stand-still, he saw the old house slumbering peacefully amid the shadows, and the sight unmanned him; leaning against the bridge, with his head low bowed upon it, he burst into tears. Poor Hal! fate had dealt hardly by him; love, with him, should have been high comedy—laughter and kisses diversified with spicy quarrels, and lo! it had turned out a tragedy. Poor Hal!

The sound of approaching steps made him start; for the first time in his honest, upright life, he was ashamed of being seen, and, hurrying home, he slipped in by the back-way, and stole up to his own room, which he barred against intrusion. He could not meet mother's eye, or Mary's, or Cyril's! Never, perhaps, since the restless process of teething and measles, had he passed such a night as he did then, tossing from side to side feverish and miserable.

Night may in many cases, perhaps, be the best time

for thought, but where love is concerned its influence is altogether fatal to sober reflection. Its darkness—its silence—its loneliness invest it with a strange mystery, deep and solemn as the shadow of the grave; and as we surround the dead with a halo of more than mortal perfection, and often in the solitude of thought long with an exceeding bitter longing to leave the ninety and nine here in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost, so at night every feeling—every sentiment is intensified. It was all very well for Harry, even in the presence of Miss Drugh, to think of consequences; now, in the feverish solitude of thought, he forgot all but her: her every look and word—the music of her voice—the dark and stormy expression that swept over her face, fascinating even while it perplexed him, haunted him with cruel pertinacity through the long, wakeful hours; and before the first grey streak of dawn, or the distant crow of some sleepy but conscientious cock heralded the approach of the Sabbath, he had formed a resolution from which all the fathers, mothers, brothers, and cousin Marys in the world could not have turned him. He would marry Miss Drugh; he loved her, and it was mean and cowardly to desert her; her disgrace should be his; and what need the world know about her past? He had been a fool to hesitate even for a moment.

Perhaps, after a quiet, refreshing nap, he might have awoken to find his enthusiasm a little cooled down; but he did not sleep, and at daybreak he was up, wandering about the farm, consulting his watch at every turn, and casting longing looks towards the distant spot where, nestling among the trees that screened it from the high road, lay the wee cottage that was to him enchanted ground.

The farm servant wondered what had come to the young master, that he turned a deaf ear to all his interesting remarks upon cows, pigs, and horses; and he wondered still more when Harry, after sending word to the Missus that he had had his breakfast, started off in the direction of Beckham Bridge.

It was a bitter cold morning; a black frost covered the earth, and all nature seemed in a state of petrification. You might have thought there had been a quarrel between day and night, when the latter had done its utmost to undo all that the other had with difficulty effected. Woe to the ill-fated buds that had ventured to peep forth and open little tender leaves, cheated by the treacherous warmth of yesterday's sun.

Harry walked briskly along, too busy with his own thoughts to take much heed of the weather. Having reached a certain field—his usual post of observation, for this was not the first time by many that he had acted the spy—he looked cautiously over the hedge into the little garden below. It was certainly not a morning to tempt anyone out, and a winter garden offers but little attraction, but he had not unfrequently, at an early hour, seen Miss Drugh pacing the narrow gravel path. Oh! if he could but have the same luck to-day; it would so simplify matters. He was always at his ease in the open air, while a room, on the contrary, oppressed and unnerved him. But he watched and waited in vain.

Lovers, we know, are proof against cold and all other inclemencies of the weather; the inward fever circulates the blood and raises them above the common infirmities of weak human nature, imparting to them somewhat of the attributes of the god who inspires them; but it would have needed a fiery robe such as that with which love invested Hercules to have kept out the intense cold of that particular morning, and Harry, standing under the great chestnut-tree whose still leafless branches offered no protection against the cutting wind, awoke at last to the humiliating consciousness of being more than half frozen. He stuffed his hands into his trouser pockets, and gave vent to a prolonged and doleful whistle. What should be his next move? for see her he must! He would gather a bunch of violets, and take them to the house; then he would loiter about the road and accompany her to church. No matter now what folks said, all Alton would soon know that she was to be his wife.

Never, surely, were a few violets put together with so much difficulty. A hundred times Hal cursed the cold, his own awkwardness, and the tender little flowers that seemed to shrink from the freezing touch of those clumsy fingers. But love surmounts all obstacles, and Hal's spirits rose as, with a last look at the deserted garden, he strode whistling across the fields; for it was a long round from the back to the front of Beckham Cottage.

Nothing so braces the nerves as a brisk walk on a frosty morning, and Harry felt strong to woo and win as he pushed open the green gate and went straight up to the door. He noticed in passing that the drawing-room blinds were down. Strange, he thought, at this late hour; could she be ill? "Will you give these flowers to Miss Drugh, with my compliments," he said, as the landlady appeared in answer to his timid knock—wiping her hands upon her apron, and endeavouring in all haste to swallow an obstinate tail of herring which, like many another knotty point, refused to be thus summarily disposed of.

"Eh, sir?" she said, with a blank stare.

"How is Miss Drugh?" Harry changed the form of question, for the woman's look and a certain air of desolation about the house chilled him with a presentiment of evil. Something was wrong; but what?

"How is she, sir? Oh, quite well, thank you—leastways, she was when she started."

"Started! Where to—to church?"

"To church! Lor' love you, no, sir! In Sims' fly, to be sure, which had to be ordered all in a hurry late last evening. Miss Drugh was wanted up in London, she said, and couldn't wait one day; and it was all such a rush and flurry, and not so much as took off our clothes all night; and so I thought I'd just make my cup o' tea afore cleaning myself up a bit to go and hear Master Thornton preach, as all Alton's a-talking of."

"Gone—impossible!" broke in poor Hal, who had staggered to the wall as if struck by some sudden blow; "where can she be gone to?"

"That's more than I can tell; her trunks was all labelled London, but when I asked her what I was to do if folks asked after her, or letters chanced to come, she said no letters would come for sure, and as to the folks——"

"She left no word—no message for—anyone?"

"Not with me, sir; and Mr. Winsmore, as was here last evening, asked for her address at parting, but she said her movements was all unsettled like, and maybe she'd write when fixed; and there's some church music of his she left on the piany; and perhaps, sir, if you're passing that way you'd just leave it at the Rectory?"

Harry nodded assent, and the landlady, shuffling off to the kitchen, there to have it out with that perverse tail that so obstinately refused to be swallowed, he went straight to the little drawing-room that only the day before had seemed to him a paradise. How desolate it looked now! The piano at which he had so often seen her seated when returning home from field work, he had lingered in the lane to catch the distant sound of her voice, seemed now to mock the longing that seized him to hear her sing once more. In that grate that but a few hours before had sent forth so warm a welcome from its glowing depths, lay now a heap of crumbling ashes; the books, the countless trifles that tell of daily life and occupation, were gone. Even the lowered blind heightened the impression of desertion and death. Fragments of newspaper, string, &c., told of the hurried packing; and there, on the floor, just as she had flung them, lay the withered violets, scentless and dead; while apart from the rest lay the bunch, tied with a white ribbon, that Caroline had worn in her bosom.

Harry was not sentimental, but he stood as if rooted to the spot, looking down upon those poor dead flowers, the only memento left him of the woman he loved; then he sighed, picked them up, and hid them away in his waistcoat pocket.

Need I say that he left the house utterly forgetful of the promised commission.

As he walked slowly home, avoiding the more frequented paths, his mind was a chaos of conflicting emotions, not the least powerful of which was—must it be owned to his shame?—relief! Never had he been insensible to the sacrifice he had been willing to offer on the shrine of his dark-browed divinity; but now that she was lost to him (that he knew by instinct), he certainly felt it a relief not to have to announce to his family the step he had so rashly taken. Before crossing Beckham Bridge he turned to look once more at the cottage that would soon be lost among the trees. Just then the sun burst forth in all its wintry glory, and borne on the still frosty air rose the sound of Sabbath bells. That friendly gleam, that joyous peal, awoke a brighter train of thought; the feeling of regret grew weaker, of relief stronger! and when, having crossed the bridge, he met troops of pedestrians flocking to Alton Church to hear Master Thornton preach, he no longer avoided them, but returned their greetings with his cheerful “Good morning,” and ready smile. And as he walked among them, he held his head high—higher, perhaps, than he had done for months past, for the novel sensation of love had made him feel sheepish, and sheepishness is by no means an ennobling sensation.

Keenly alive as were all the Thorntons to outward influences, the bracing air, the genial sun-smile, the hearty voices of the neighbours—were things just then more real and vivid than the pale image of the girl he was never to see again. No, they never met again; but even to this day Caroline is not forgotten, and the casual mention of her name, a strange voice singing a song she sang, or the first sweet breath of the early violet, sends a strange thrill through Harry Thornton’s heart, and the dead love lives again.

As for the faded violets, they lay forgotten in his waistcoat pocket until next market-day, when he once more donned his Sunday attire. Then, while standing on the narrow pavement of the busy country town, engaged in an animated discussion with Miss Bessy Croaker,

[resplendent in a new hat with a bright green feather, and a brighter blue silk dress,] he suddenly remembered a note from Mary, that was to be delivered into Miss Croaker's own fair hands, and, pulling it hastily from his pocket, out tumbled with it the withered bunch, tied with a white ribbon! His heightened colour, and the nervous haste with which he stooped to pick it up, aroused the lady's jealous suspicions, and mercilessly she quizzed the young farmer, who, conscience-stricken, and reddening to his ears, stoutly denied its being the gift of any sweetheart—what nonsense!—whereupon the young lady remarked maliciously that then it could of course be of no value, and not worth the trouble of picking up; to which the young man angrily agreed, declaring that it might lie till Doomsday for aught he cared. So there the dead violets lay until a dirty little naked foot kicked them into the road, where the heavy tread of cattle soon stamped them into the yielding, rain-soaked earth.

So ended the one romance of Harry Thornton's life! And how had it ended for Caroline Drugh? Let us retrace our steps, and see her as she turns slowly from the door, through which the portly person of Mr. Winsmore has just disappeared, and sinks into a low chair before the fire. Her first thought, calm and dispassionate, is of Harry Thornton, whose blunt, honest love, manly protection, and comfortable home, that want could never visit, are now all lost to her.

"All lost!" she repeats aloud, with a mocking laugh, and draws from her pocket a crumpled note, poor Harry's declaration. "Yes, all lost! The pleasing monotony of a village life; the devotion of hearts I should share in common with cows and horses, pigs and fowls; the intellectual society of other farmers' wives, with, perhaps, the patronising notice of the rector's family; the sisterly affection of cousin Mary, who would initiate me in the mysteries of butter-making; the cravings of my soul fed from the circulating library and my own lonely thoughts. This were a loss, indeed!"

She threw the note into the fire, and as she watched it curl, and blacken, and quiver into dust, her thoughts wandered far away to that past whose dead ashes lay so thick around her path that it seemed as if no flower could ever grow there. Once more the strong man and the young child are together alone—the heavy prison walls shut them out from the rest of the world. Her arms are about his neck, and as he rests his head upon the soft bare shoulder the silence of the cell is broken by his cry of agony, and the arms folded about the little figure tighten their clasp—closer—closer—as, tortured by unavailing remorse, he realises all the misery that his crime will entail upon his darling.

“Oh, horrible! horrible!” she murmurs, below her breath, while her great eyes dilate as at some sight of terror. “Shall I never learn to forget? Will no new impression ever replace that one haunting memory? Oh, my father!—my dear, dear father!—who, whatever the world may think of you, were the best man I ever care to know,—who loved me as no one will ever love me again,—who rocked me to sleep night after night in your arms, because I would go to no one else,—who taught me, played with me, were all the world to me, for we were only two—you and I! But I was with you to the last, dear! They could not keep me from you. I was with you through all your hour of anguish and despair, and I kissed away your tears, and told you how the angels whispered to me through the long night when I lay awake praying for you, and how my mother spoke to me in dreams, and bade me tell you that she would be near you—very near you—at the last! and how she smiled as she passed away, and I knew by that smile that what she said was true, for she could not have been happy had you been lost to her for ever. And so I comforted you, and you grieved no more after that.”

Over the girl's face breaks a strange light—soft and tender, as if the angel-mother's hand were passing lightly over the passion-working features. One moment thought

pauses entranced, then it drifts on to more bitter memories,—

“I was with you, when the wretch whose word had been your death fiat stood before you in all the glory of his strong manhood, and implored your forgiveness and your blessing; and as I lay upon your breast I heard you sigh, but you forgave, and blessed him! Oh, father, father! why did you not curse as he knelt at your feet? You died—you, his benefactor, alone and accursed; but he lives an honoured, useful life—the very life from which he cut you off. Oh, why did you not curse him!—why did you not curse him with your latest breath!”

There is a long shuddering pause, and the evil light returns dark and deadly to the half-closed eyes veiled by their heavy lash, and the same flame that reflects itself like some mocking fiend in their troubled depths lights up the open page of the Bible that lies on a little table at her side. The Bible in which father and child had read together in the old lost days, which had been his best friend and comforter in the solitude of his prison cell, and whose pages are in many places blistered with his tears.

But Caroline Drugh seeks counsel nowhere but in her own passionate heart, so full of burning hatred and revenge. Well is it that the cry of the poor storm-tossed heart dies on the silent air, or is hushed to rest on the bosom of pitying angels; for the gentle and the happy must not be startled by such words as broke from the orphan's lips that night.

“One death was amply atoned for—life for life! but who shall avenge the blood that cries from your unhallowed grave? Is the dead blessing stronger than the living curse? Time shall decide; but if there be a God in heaven, the curse of the orphan shall fall upon your betrayer, and crush him in the strength and pride of his manhood. Shame and disgrace shall dishonour his name, as it has dishonoured ours; domestic treachery shall desecrate his hearth, and make him taste in its full bit-

terness the agony of misplaced love and confidence, and awaking at last from his proud dreams of ambition to find himself alone in the world forsaken alike of God and man; may he recall in the depths of his humiliation and despair the friend who loved and trusted him, and see in his ruined life the hand of an avenging Fate! So may the orphan's curse pursue him—even unto death!"

As the last words ring through the silence of the room, the clasped hands one moment raised to heaven, drop heavily upon the open Bible, and with low-bowed head Caroline sinks from the chair to her knees. Is her attitude but expressive of the utter abandonment of her soul, or has she assumed it that the dire curse may rise to heaven in the form of a prayer? Does not an old proverb tell us that "curses, like chickens, come home to roost"?

CHAPTER IV.

THE first sermon—the first speech—the first novel—or poem—or picture! Success or failure, triumph or mortification. The one to the lucky, the other to the unlucky,—fortune is capricious in her gifts, and does not favour all alike.

When the landlady at Beckham Cottage had told Hal that all Alton was talking of Cyril Thornton's first sermon, she had not been far from the truth. Country people have but few excitements, and are, therefore, apt to make the most of those few. Many a housewife got up an hour earlier that bleak frosty morning to get things a bit straight before starting for church. Many a mother who had made the baby an excuse for non-attendance for weeks past, and thus won the rector's forgiveness, now saw no great harm in taking it along with her, just for once in a way. Many a veteran too, confined for months to his armchair with the rheumatics, which were always

somehow "real bad" of a Sunday, now braved cold and distance, and with the aid of his stick, or the sturdy arm of a grandson, went to hear Master Cyril preach. Even the youths who had not entered the church porch since their Sunday-school days, preferring the freedom of chapel or a stroll in the fields with some congenial spirits, to the good Rector's unmeaning though no doubt well-meaning discourse comprising so many heads, that it became a very Cerberus—an object of terror to those alike on the road to heaven and hell,—now fired with the hope of hearing something new, clustered about the door, their numbers receiving constant reinforcements until the beadle, whose scarlet still inspired a certain wholesome dread in Alton's fierce rebellious youth, seeing danger in this monster meeting, sternly bade them move off, a mandate that was obeyed or defied according to the difference of character.

Last, but not least, among those whom curiosity, interest, or love of excitement brought to church—come the ladies—who should undoubtedly have stood first, for never perhaps had there been seen in Alton village such a display of new bonnets, hats, and gowns. For the neighbouring town of Langdon, sharing in the general excitement, had sent forth vehicles of all kinds, to vary the monotony of the road. Some of the visitors having friends at Alton, made a day of it; others tied up the light gig or cart to the churchyard rails, and Farmer Thornton's stables were open to those who would avail themselves of the accommodation.

Dotting the fields in all directions might still be seen pedestrians of every age and condition, and conveyances still clattered noisily along the high road, when the bells, which had hitherto been swinging lazily, sent forth a loud awakening peal, and the eager whisper circulated around, "He's coming!"

Surely, hero-worship is one of the strongest instincts of the human soul, and one of its noblest, for it is the triumph of mind over matter, the ideal over the real. In the life of towns it is of course an all-powerful influence

—enthusiasm is contagious and spreads like wild-fire; the press, that mighty organ, strong alike to make and unmake, utters its thunder voice, and the crowd from without answers by a shout of applause. The man who is famous, is a hero! Hence the gods of the ancients, heroes whose fame outlived and deified them.

Perhaps of all classes, our English agriculturist is least open to vivid impressions, but if in him the instinct of hero-worship is less developed, it is, therefore, all the truer and deeper. Many an one worshipped in the world as a hero, would be an actual object of scorn and derision to the simple ploughman, who would yet offer his rough homage to a Nelson, a Wellington, or a Howard.

He's coming! And sure enough down the green slope of the hill came the hero of the day, Cyril Thornton! For years he had gone in and out among his people, attracting as little notice as any other lad in the village, but now all eyes were turned upon him. Cyril, however, was not a clerical puppy—at least at this stage of his career; he was an enthusiast and a visionary, proud of his mission, and seeing in himself a chosen vessel, but jealous of God's glory only, not his own. It was love for the dear ones at home, untainted by any thought of self-exaltation, that had made him anxious to preach his first sermon in Alton Church; but now, as he entered the churchyard, the unusual concourse there assembled, startled and unnerved him; for the first time in his life he was overpowered by a feeling of shyness; he flushed, passed hastily through the crowd as if in a violent hurry, and at once entered the vestry.

This sudden reserve caused no little disappointment, especially among the young ladies, who had prepared many a pert or tender little speech wherewith to captivate the day's hero, for coquetry is of all ranks and places. But Cyril, if the only hero, was not the only favoured one, and Harry just then appearing, was overwhelmed with congratulations, which he shook off with his usual rough good humour. Soon after followed the

rest of the Thornton family, and then the bells ceasing, all entered the sacred building, which being small was inconveniently crowded. Every pew originally constructed to hold six, managed to take in an odd one; as for the children, they disappeared altogether from public view, finding a place somewhere at their mothers' feet, which feet contrived by certain admonitory kicks to keep them tolerably quiet.

Boys are always victims, and on this particular occasion, those who were too shy to fight their way into a seat, and hold their own against the united attacks of the women, young and old, had to prop their backs up against the walls and door, and keep the perpendicular throughout the service. Ranged on a bench placed by the font, in the full blaze of the beadle's eye, might be seen the black sheep of the village, their ages varying from six to twelve.

Hardly had all shaken down into their places when the voluntary struck up. As usual the rector drawled through the service, and as usual the congregation looking upon it as a sort of indispensable preface to the sermon, left it altogether to the minister, only joining lustily in the hymns. Towards the end of the last, the vestry door was heard to open, and Mary looking up, saw through a mist of blinding tears, the realisation of her brightest, proudest dreams, Cyril—her Cyril—arrayed in his flowing black robes standing in the pulpit, high above the rest of their little world, God's prophet and ambassador! Was not this the happiest moment of her young life?—that for which she had longed and prayed?—oh yes, it was all very strange and beautiful, and she was very, very happy, if only now that he was so far above them all, he would not love her and the dear old home less! And as all sank to their knees, she quietly wiped away the ungrateful tears and blamed herself for her selfish forebodings.

All was expectation. The rector leaning comfortably back in the old carved altar chair, seemed ready alike to sleep or listen. Farmer Thornton, his arms and legs

crossed, exchanged smiles with Mary. Cyril had resisted the temptations of his college life, had gained honours, and made no debts, therefore he stood high in his father's favour just then. Mrs. Thornton, good simple soul, deeply impressed with the importance of the occasion, having made a lap, received into it the great family Bible, only brought to church on very solemn occasions, and having duly adjusted her spectacles, and wetted her thumb, waited for what was to follow. If ever mother was proud and elated, Mrs. Thornton was that day, and not without reason; certainly, Cyril looked very handsome in the pulpit, the loose robe and muslin bands became him well, and Mary, her eyes glistening all the brighter for their recent tears, bent towards Hal, and whispered rapturously, "Doesn't he look beautiful!"

The text chosen was an appropriate one; but unfortunately it died somewhere between the Book and the crimson pulpit-cushion, and the preacher had to clear his throat, pitch his voice to a more audible key, and repeat it once again. After this, however, all went on smoothly enough; his words, simple but forcible, flowed on in an uninterrupted stream; his manner was earnest, even impassioned. It was a situation his dreams had often brought vividly before him,—the young preacher, addressing, for the first time, the simple villagers among whom he had been born and reared! The opening address he had, as it were, got by heart. He told them how great had been his wish, before he went out from among them, separating his life and interests from theirs, to bring them a message from that distant home, whose ambassador he was!—a message of hope and peace, such as, no doubt, came to many of them amid the hush of the Sabbath eve, as they watched the gradual sinking to sleep of nature, secure in the protection of that God into whose hands we would all at the last commend our spirits. It was a strange and solemn thought, he said, that in the very building hallowed to him by so many recollections, he should now have the blessed privilege of bringing the glad tidings of great joy to

those even whose age and experience placed them so far beyond him on the heavenward road, and from whose pure and simple lives he had learnt more of true wisdom than the philosophy of school or college could ever teach him. It was pleasant, too, before going among strangers, to see gathered around him so many faces familiar to him from his childhood; and it was not without emotion that he recognised many of his own age, companions of the old schooldays, when they had sat on the same form and shared the same sports. Would they now, in memory of those bygone days, allow him, as their friend and minister, to offer them a few words of affectionate warning? Eagerly the preacher bent forward; but alas for his inspiration!

At that particular moment the beadle, a really intelligent man, interested in Cyril's earnest appeal, having withdrawn his attention from the black sheep committed to his charge, two of them, true to their character, had seized this auspicious moment to commence a wrestling match, in which the weakest went, not to the wall, but the ground; and at this critical juncture of affairs it was that the preacher's eye, seeking those more favoured ones—companions of his youth, &c.—fell upon the black sheep instead; and the sight was fatal to his inspiration! The thread of his discourse was broken. Here, too, unfortunately, his mental notes ceased. Having awakened their interest, he had now to expound to them the text; but how? He turned to the verse, read it over, cleared his throat, but not alas! his ideas; and his eye wandered involuntarily over the congregation, as if seeking encouragement among them. At a glance he took in the scene before him, and found it anything but encouraging. The boys in the gallery, no way impressed by his appeal, trying by well-directed showers of peas to attract the attention of their intimates in the aisle; the pew below the pulpit devoted to the deaf and their trumpets, which lay unused in the laps of the owners, who all slumbered and slept—all but one. Old Betty Parkes, who, to please Miss Mary, who kept her well supplied with snuff

and tea, had stationed herself right under the pulpit, her trumpet—a remarkably long one—raised ostentatiously to her ear, and marking, by many an audible groan, her appreciation of the young minister's eloquence; the mothers who had brought their babies, wholly engrossed in the difficult task of keeping them quiet; the village coquettes giggling together or exchanging pantomimic signs with the hobble-dehoys clustered about the door—was this the scene his imagination had conjured up? Alas for life's fair dreams and sober realities!

There was a pause, that, counted by heart-throbs, seemed an unnaturally long one; he knew by instinct that every eye was riveted upon him. What all his eloquence could not effect had been effected by that ominous pause; no sleeping now! Even the old women were awake, and had resumed their trumpets. With a mighty effort he tried to collect the scattered ideas that danced hither and thither as if mocking his distress. Where were now the words that in his lonely musings had rushed forth like an impetuous torrent? Oh! for the sudden annihilation that had punished Korah and his company for their presumption in having taken upon them the priesthood! Mid the oppressive silence he heard the rector's smooth interrogatory cough, Betty's periodical groans, and the occasional stifled wail of some refractory infant. "He must say something! Oh! for a note, an extract, a word, on which to fix his mind." With a final clearing of the throat, he once more plunged head-long into his subject, perfectly conscious all the time that his words had no connection whatever with it; and, losing himself in a haze of abstract calculations, about as clear to him as to his hearers, and still, through the cloud that seemed to shut him out from the rest of the world, he could see, like the dim distant phantoms of a dream, poor Farmer Thornton's perplexed look, and the troubled, wistful eyes of Cousin Mary; then everything span round and round; his head reeled as if he were standing on the edge of a precipice; there was a strange beating at his heart, a singing in his ears; and with a

gasping sigh he fell heavily forward. At the same time the red pulpit cushion, at which he had convulsively clutched, fell over on the top of old Betty's head, who changed her groan to a shriek; and, believing in her fright this sudden crash to be the precursor of the last judgment and the angel's trumpet, dropped her own, inveighing wildly against the "woman in scarlet," who, according to prophecy, had fallen: for crazy Betty had been a regular chapel-goer until Mary's tea and snuff had coaxed her into being orthodox; and the "women in scarlet" is, we know, a very favourite subject with dissenting ministers. Meanwhile Cyril had been conveyed into the vestry, and the wildest confusion ensued. All the babies awoke simultaneously, and set up a chorus of wails; the juveniles in the gallery and on the bench, seeing no just cause or impediment why there should not be a general rising, effected one accordingly. There was a confused hubbub of voices; and those in the front pew were offering their trumpets to all the neighbours in succession, when the Rector emerged from the vestry, informed the congregation that his reverend brother had merely fainted, and was now much better, but would be unable to continue his discourse; then he gave the blessing, and all were free to go—free, but not willing, for most of them, either from real interest or mere idle curiosity, loitered about the churchyard, waiting for the appearance of some one from the vestry.

"Well, lad, it's all right now—eh?" asked the farmer, in his cheery tone, as Cyril, who had but slowly recovered, and now sat very pale and still, and quite unlike the Cyril of a few hours before, turned to his father with a faint smile, and held out his hand.

"Oh, yes, father, thank you, I'm all right now."

"Then let's be off. You'll be better lying down in your own room; for it's not much air we get in this bit of a place."

"Oh, never mind me, father; if you and the rest go

now, I'll follow presently;" and with a heightened colour Cyril glanced uneasily at the door.

Mary, who had perfectly understood the involuntary glance, slipped out. All eagerly crowded around her, and instinctively she felt how painful it would be to poor Cyril to pass through the midst of his late congregation all gaping and staring at him with more of curiosity than interest.

She had lived too long among the good country folk not to know how to manage them. Greeting them with her pleasant hearty smile, she adopted a certain easy confidential tone that each one took to himself. Mr. Thornton, she said, knowing that his kind friends would be anxious to hear about him, had sent her out to quiet their minds. He was better—much better, but must be kept very quiet, and must be got home with as little delay and fuss as possible, or he might yet have a relapse. "He has worked too hard, you know," she added, "and the seeing so many familiar faces upset him, I think. I'm sure I wonder he kept up so long as he did."

Whilst speaking, she had been leading the way, unconsciously as it were, to the churchyard gate, through which she saw them all pass safely out; then she returned, and, slipping up to Cyril's chair, bent over it, whispering softly, "They are all gone; the way home is quite clear."

Cyril's brightening look was her best thanks. He rose at once, and leaning on his father's arm, for he still trembled nervously, walked slowly back to the farm.

None but Mary ever guessed all the bitterness of that day's humiliation. The farmer, who believed in neither geniuses nor inspirations, was only anxious about the boy's health, as was also his mother, who, looking upon the sermon as a wonderful production throughout, had become lost in admiration of his extraordinary learning in proportion as he lost himself in abstract speculation; and at last, words failing him altogether, words would

equally have failed her to express her wondering awe of his superior talents as orator and theologian.

But Mary saw far deeper, for she saw with Cyril's eyes, and, watching him closely throughout the day, understood all that was involved in that first miserable failure. It is not pleasant to be despised by those in whose service you are willing to spend and be spent, but it is intolerable to have to despise yourself; and words cannot describe the utter contempt Cyril felt for himself that day.

To many of us, perhaps, has come some such hour of mortification. Every dream has its awaking, and success is but for the few. To insure that success, you must have perfect faith both in yourself and your destiny. This faith, which is in itself a gift, has raised many a fool to a position envied by the great, and through it the great become greater. With its aid you can do everything; without it, nothing. The first great disappointment shakes it to its very foundation; but whereas one will rise like the phoenix, all the greater and stronger from its own ashes, another will never rise at all.

How will it be with Cyril?

All day Mary watched him, in no way deceived by his assumed gaiety, or the jesting tone he affected whenever the occurrences of the morning were referred to. After dinner he took a long solitary walk, tearing along at a furious pace; but she knew well enough from his worn and jaded air, as he appeared at the tea-table, that he had found solitude anything but a pleasant companion.

How she longed to comfort him! But it was not until late in the evening, when father and Hal had gone to have a last look round the farm, that she found the opportunity so ardently desired.

They had the hall entirely to themselves—yes, entirely, though Mrs. Thornton occupied the great arm-chair placed midway between the fire and table, on which lay the family bible open at the destruction of Sodom; for Mrs. Thornton, though the mildest and least vindic-

tive of women, invariably chose those portions of scripture that are the most denunciatory. Marking the direst passage, lay the spectacles, that, bright with their extra Sunday rub, might well have thrown light upon the darkest subject; but Mother Thornton's vision was just then altogether obscured, for amid the ruins of the doomed cities of the plain—she slept!

Mary knew that she could trust those Sabbath slumbers, which were of a strangely profound and peaceful order, so she drew her chair close up to Cyril, who was gazing moodily into the fire with a face as utterly miserable as if he had lost his last earthly friend, or worse still—his last penny.

Mary sat as quiet as a mouse, waiting for him to speak first. She had to wait a long time, but at last he broke out sharply and bitterly, "Oh, birdie! what a fool, what a miserable fool, I have been."

"Cyril, dear Cyril, how can you speak so?"

"Yes, a miserable deluded fool," he repeated savagely. "Better, a thousand times better, have stuck to the farm, like Hal, or have sunk without an effort to the level of Mr. Winsmore, or any other good man, who at least speaks sense, than to have insulted God as I did this morning."

"No, Cyril," interrupted Mary, quietly but firmly; "better a thousand times meet with twenty such disappointments as you had to-day, than sink below your own level."

"My own level!—what level? that of a presumptuous dreamer, who trusted in his aspirations and——"

"Wouldn't take notes with him into the pulpit; and broke down just at the finest part of his sermon; for it was fine, Cyril—your voice, your words, your manner, thrilled me as I have never been thrilled before."

"That's just like you, always buoying me up with false hopes. To listen to you and mother, one would think I was the eighth wonder of the world." He laughed an unpleasant mocking laugh, and relapsed into silence. But Mary was not to be repulsed.

"Ah, you may laugh now, but time will prove that mother and I were right. You can't be great all at once; and if you had preached to the most crowded church in London, you would not have found it half as trying, as the seeing all those familiar faces about you: it was that upset you."

"So it was, Birdie. From the moment I saw the crowd in the churchyard I had an odd uncomfortable sort of feeling—a wish to be out of it all. And oh!" he broke out again with passionate vehemence, "I so trusted in the truth and power of the gospel to help me. It always seemed to me so glorious a reality, that I wondered it did not inspire the dullest and most lukewarm; but I understand it better now." Yes, Cyril Thornton would never again despise his weaker brethren: having felt with, he could feel for them.

Mary was neither a flatterer nor an enthusiast, but Cyril must be comforted; and it is seldom that a woman tries to comfort the man she loves, in vain. Gradually she drew his thoughts from the past to the future, and she spoke of his career with such perfect confidence, that at last her faith in him awoke once more the faith he had lost in himself. A little more tender flattery on her side, a little further bitterness on his, and her triumph was complete.

"And you won't love us all less when you are a great man, will you, Cyril? You will find the people in London so very different from us—so clever and fashionable and interesting; but no one will ever love you better than I—than we do; you won't quite forget us, will you, Cyril?"

In her eagerness, Mary had left her seat, and crouching down at his side, she looked up pleadingly into his face.

"If I should ever rise——"

"You *will* rise, dear."

"Well, then *when* I rise," he corrected with a smile, "you will rise with me, birdie: that is an old promise, you know."

Mary's eyes dropped from Cyril's face, and she laid her flushed cheek down upon the hand she held. There was a long pause, and both relapsed into a reverie—he to dream of fame, she of love. And the fire burned low in the grate, all unheeded, and the cinders fell slowly one by one, with a soft tinkling sound, until the motionless figures of the dreamers were wrapt in shadow.

"Halloa! the room in darkness, the fire nearly out, and no sign of supper, though Hal and I are half frozen and quite famished."

Both Mary and Cyril had started up at the first sound of the farmer's voice. "The truth is, father," said the latter, with a slightly mocking but no longer bitter laugh, "Birdie had just raised me to a bishopric, and in the first flush of clerical pride I forgot everything but the lawn sleeves and apron."

"And the missus—where is she?"

"Here I am, dear," said a meek voice, proceeding from the depths of the arm-chair.

"For shame, wife!" said the farmer, sily: "here are your children keeping the fire to the last bar, because they know you're somewhere between Sodom and Zoar, and fear for you the fate of Lot's wife——"

Poor Mrs. Thornton, conscience-stricken, roused herself with an effort, smoothed her cap and apron, cast a deprecating look at the unused spectacles, which she restored to their case, and it to her pocket, and smiled her gentle placid smile by way of general atonement. Cyril, now once more himself, poked the fire lustily, until it sent forth a ruddy blaze, heaped on fresh wood, and drew his father's chair to within easy roasting distance.

Mary meanwhile had slipped quietly out to see after the supper.

CHAPTER V.

"No.—Belgrave Square, and drive as fast as you can."

Dr. Cameron's coachman knew what that order meant—a matter of life and death; and the fine bays, with the light foam gathering about their bits, were soon standing at the door of one of the handsomest houses of that very handsome square, which, gay as it always is in the height of the season, was particularly so just then, it being about seven o'clock, the hour at which most of the fashionables are returning from the park. There was the ceaseless roll of carriage wheels; elegant equipages stood at many of the doors, and elegant women, in light clouds of silk, tulle, or lace fluttered out of them; a bright May sun illumined the scene, and a lively band was playing at one of the corners. All spoke of life, excitement, and careless, soulless pleasure.

"Am I in time?" asked the doctor of the gaily liveried footman.

The man's look was sufficient answer. Dr. Cameron knew the worst even before he said. "Master's gone, sir! I knew he was when we lifted him from the cab; but the others thought it was only a faint. We sent for the family doctor, sir."

"Who was out, it seems. Show me up at once."

The man led the way up the gorgeously gilded and ornamented staircase, past the grand suite of drawing-rooms, to a room on the floor above. Just then the door opened, and a woman came out. Her dress was that of an upper servant, and her face wore an expression of mingled horror and despair. Not expecting to see a stranger, she stopped short, and the footman explained.

"Dr. Hall was out, so this gentleman's come instead."

The woman put her finger to her lip, and broke out in a hurried whisper, "It's nothing you can do for the master, sir; but oh! if you could do something for my

young mistress, who's like one demented!—and where's the wonder? But she hangs about the body, and won't let anyone so much as look at it. Oh, woe's the day! Whatever's to be done?"

A dead man, and a young mistress half wild with grief—Dr. Cameron had daily experience of such scenes as this. Tears of agony; mute, appealing looks from eyes too agonised for tears; wild, frenzied words from pallid, writhing lips;—these things met him on many a threshold, and if his face was grave as he listened to the woman's broken words, when did the Scotch doctor's face ever look otherwise?

As they opened the door, they heard a low wailing sound, half moan, half sob, which ceased, however, as they entered the room. The Venetian blinds were down, but the window was open, and through it there floated in the many jarring sounds of the gay world without. On the bed, the outline of the form discernible below the light cambric quilt, lay the man who had gone forth in perfect health that morning to be brought home—a corpse!

"Come, Miss Winnie dear," said the woman, in a coaxing tone, and speaking with a strong Irish brogue to some invisible person, "here's the kind doctor come to see your poor papa; you'll get up and let him have a sight of him, won't you?—there's a dear!"

There was slight stir under the coverlet, a quick hand pushed aside one corner of it, and Doctor Cameron, who had now reached the bed, looked down upon a little, white, woe-begone face, and a pair of wild, horror-filled eyes, peering up at him from amid bright masses of loose, tumbled hair.

"Was it the face of a woman or a child? A child, surely; women do not look out upon the world with such eyes as those." Youth and sorrow ever claimed his deepest sympathy; and there was something in the face before him, still and colourless as that of the dead man himself, that struck him very painfully. Still, she must be got away, even if he had to carry her out in

his own strong arms. When he spoke, therefore, it was in a tone of authority, though his voice was gentle.

At first he thought she did not understand him, for she never once removed from his face the great eyes so full of a wild terror; and it was only when he repeated his words for the third time that the white lips moved, and she gasped out, in a low broken voice that was little more than a whisper, "I can't leave him, indeed I can't—he won't let me." And shuddering convulsively, she pointed to the poor, pale head that, encircled by her arm, lay heavily back upon her breast; "he won't let me!" she repeated passionately.

Very tenderly the doctor put out his hand to relieve her of her ghastly burden; but with a quick gesture she flung herself forward, and clasping both her arms about the dead man's neck, hid him away beneath the bright wealth of her hair. For one moment the doctor stood irresolute. It seemed cruel to use force, and the poor child clung so wildly; but no time was to be lost—go she must. "Nurse," he said, turning to the Irishwoman, who stood behind him wringing her hands and weeping bitterly, "help your young mistress to rise, and take her out of the room; if you can't, I *must*." But at that moment a little cold hand was laid upon his arm, and, as he turned, he saw Winifred Morgan standing between him and the dead! Winifred Morgan—small, slight, and childish, it is true, but a woman still; standing all unconscious of her power on the threshold of the sacred temple of womanhood, that threshold on the which the girl's pure foot, as it crosses it, inscribes the heart's best watchword—home!

Startled out of his usual self-possession, Dr. Cameron stood silent and embarrassed, looking down upon the mournful little figure before him. Mournful, indeed! in its gay attire of gauze and lace, that in its first airy freshness had no doubt made a fair show in the park that afternoon, but which now, tossed and tumbled, clung about the shrinking form like so many flimsy rags. The fairy bonnet, with its wreaths of flowers now crushed into

a shapeless mass, had fallen back upon her neck, and her hair, unbound and dishevelled, hung about her face, imparting to it something weird and elfin-like. Altogether, her appearance would have been ludicrous had it not been so utterly pitiable. Suddenly upon the silence of the room broke the sharp sound of music playing below the window—a joyous burst, dying away as it arose. Strange respect of the living for the dead! Winifred shuddered. “I am so cold,” she moaned, looking up into the doctor’s face with the dull, vacant look that too often comes into the eyes of those broken by some sudden shock.

He took the dead man’s plaid that hung over a chair, and wrapped it tenderly around her; then, shivering still, but without another backward look, Winifred left the room.

“Coax her to sleep, if possible,” were the doctor’s last words to the nurse; “and until she has had that sleep, on no account allow her to return here. Hers is a strangely delicate organisation,” he muttered thoughtfully to himself, as he closed the door and returned to the dead man’s side.

It needed but a glance to assure him that death had been instantaneous—probably a fainting fit, which had proved fatal, owing to latent disease of the heart.

How awful a mystery is that sudden annihilation! The strong man goes forth rejoicing in his strength; the teeming brain, the iron will, the keen susceptibilities, the god-like vigour of mind and body are his to command—powerful agents to whom it is entrusted to work out his destiny. Not a flaw in the whole of that grand machinery; not a sign of weakness; and lo! without warning, swift as the flash of an avenging sword, silent and terrible, it comes! What matters it that in his sublime arrogance he carved out his future, and deemed himself immortal? Six feet of earth and a monumental stone, on which the stranger’s hand records his name; and even that, the time he once defied effaces from the chronicle of the living.

Such were the thoughts that passed through Dr. Cameron's mind, as he drew the sheet once more over the stalwart form thus struck down in the full glory of early manhood.

"This is dreadful—dreadful indeed!" Dr. Hall had entered unheard, and now stood beside the bed. The friends exchanged a silent greeting. There was a solemn pause, broken at last by Dr. Hall. "You were too late?"

"Alas, yes; he must have been dead nearly an hour."

"A most extraordinary case! So terribly sudden; and such a fine man, too—never had a day's illness in his life; such a constitution! and the strength of a Hercules. I would have insured his life to any amount. Yet mischief must have been going on for some time, I fear."

"But need never have declared itself; there has been some great shock here. Look at that face, Hall; I think it tells its own tale."

The poor little doctor was bewildered; he saw death stamped upon the features in characters awfully distinct, but that was all. He was not a close observer, like Dr. Cameron, who had read the secret of many a buried life in the face of the dead.

"A shock, you think?" he said, hesitatingly; "and of what nature?"

"Yes, certainly a shock; some sudden blow that has killed him. That strange, startled look, that death has surprised upon the face, could not have been its natural expression; every curve is so smooth, not a line or wrinkle indicative either of thought, care, or suffering. The man's nature must have been a remarkably easy and unthinking one, or his life altogether prosperous and free from emotions."

"Wonderful, really wonderful!" said Dr. Hall, lost in admiration of his friend's extraordinary penetration. "You have depicted both his life and character exactly; he was the most fortunate man I ever met; boasted of his good luck continually; told me only the other day

that everything he touched turned to gold. He was a fatalist, you know."

"*Was*; and *is*—what? Ah, Hall, how impassable a gulf separates those two words!"

There was a long silence, disturbed by no sound from without save the sharp ticking of the dead man's watch, which still beat against his heart, although for him time had for ever ceased. For him, but not for all; and Dr. Cameron, remembering other visits he had to pay left further investigation to his friend.

On his way out he met the old Irish nurse carrying a tray, on which stood a steaming glass of brandy-and-water. "For whom is this?" he asked, laying his hand authoritatively on the glass.

"Sure, sir, it's only a drop of comfort, I'm taking to Miss Winnie; and not before she wants it, poor lamb, for she's almost as dead as the master himself,—not having a good cry out, but moaning and grieving to herself, and going on about being so cold; and I thought as how a drop of something warm would cheer and comfort——"

"Comfort!" interrupted the doctor sternly, "when the hand of the Lord is heavy upon your poor young mistress; is this the comfort you offer her?"

"And not so bad, either; for isn't it following yer honour's own words to get her to sleep as soon as possible? and how that's ever to be done without a drop of comf——Sure, then, yer honour, and what am I to call it?"

"Poison, woman," was the stern answer. "Drug your mistress to sleep with that, and she would awake in a high fever."

"Oh, woe's the day! and whatever *is* to be done for her, poor lamb?" Here the tears and lamentations broke out afresh.

"With man it is impossible, but not with God; with Him all things are possible."

"Och, and if it's quoting Scripture that you are, sir, doesn't the Wise Man himself say, 'Give strong drink

unto them that are ready to perish, and wine unto those that are of heavy heart'?" And over the anxious, tear-stained face broke a flash of Irish humour.

The doctor was shocked; but he saw that the woman was in sore trouble, and needed help rather than reproof, so laying his hand upon her shoulder, he said, kindly, "If you have set your heart upon something warm, make a cup of tea as strong as you please, and ask Dr. Hall to send a composing draught."

"And you'll call in again to-morrow, won't you, sir?" she said, in a coaxing tone. "It's not much Miss Winnie minds Dr. Hall—meaning no disrespect to him, neither; but I'm mighty sure she'll mind *you*. You'll come again, won't you, sir?" she repeated, anxiously. The truth was that the first keen glance of that strange doctor's eye had inspired the ignorant Irishwoman with a confidence as entire as it was sudden; and she trusted in his authority to impose obedience upon the wayward young mistress upstairs.

Dr. Cameron hesitated, and, as he did so, his whole future—honour, peace, happiness—trembled in the balance. If at that moment accident, or fate, or an all-ruling Providence had not thrown the Irishwoman in his way, with her coaxing voice and pleading eyes, he would have left the house as he had entered it, and Winifred, pale, golden-haired Winifred, who embodied his destiny, would have passed from his life for ever. Oh! if the future could but have cast some shadow before, how would he have turned with shuddering horror from the fate that his own words so quietly sealed.

Vain reflection! that so often comes too late, with the heart-sickening thought, "Oh, had I but known! Could I but have foreseen!" Poor, blind, predestinated mortal, the result would have been equally the same; so go on thy way and fear nothing, for be sure the Irrevocable awaits thee, as it awaited James Cameron on the threshold of that ill-omened house.

Dr. Cameron hesitated, then he said, "Listen to me, my good woman; if you promise to obey my instructions,

I will call in again to-morrow; but if I then find that you have deceived me in the smallest particular, I shall return no more. You understand me?"

"Och, and is it I would be deceiving a gentleman like you? and thanking you for your kindness, sir, it's not a mortal drop out of this glass my young mistress shall taste, on the word of an Irishwoman; and it's proving it I'll be, too!" So saying, and before the doctor could stop her, she had drained the glass at a draught.

Having written a prescription and given a few parting instructions, Dr. Cameron left the house, and nurse Malloney returned to the kitchen, muttering to herself, "No, I'm not the girl to deceive the doctor, knowing he'd find me out for sure. A cup of tea, he said; well, and no such bad thing, neither, with a little something in it. It's the brandy he said was poison, but he made no mention of rum!"

"No. — Rutland Gate," was Dr. Cameron's next order to the coachman.

But, before proceeding thither, I would here say a few words about its occupant, Mrs. Charlton Leigh, widow of General Leigh, and possessor of a handsome fortune and person, of both of which she well knew how to make the most. All Mrs. Leigh's friends, those more especially who were cursed with small fortunes and large families, thought her the most enviable of mortals; but in her own eyes she was a martyr, and her martyrdom was—nerves! Of what benefit to her was a fine, healthy constitution, when she fancied herself the victim of every infirmity to which human flesh is heir? What availed it to her that she had yet twenty years to live e'er she reached man's allotted span, when in imagination she died daily? Of all medical advisers she could have chosen, Mr. Cameron was perhaps the hardest and least sympathetic. Nerves were to him a folly, a delusion; and to follies and delusions he was uncompromising. Accustomed to see sickness at every turn in all its ghastly reality—its affectation he thought both contemptible and sinful. But if he *could* be in-

dulgent to any nervous patient, it would be to his old friend, Mrs. Leigh, who years before had taken him by the hand and exerted herself in his behalf, when he had come a stranger to London, without interest or patronage of any kind. Whether her good word really helped him on in his career was a question he never asked himself now that that career was made; and, grateful for past kindness, he bore all her little eccentricities with a half-mocking, half-pitying indulgence, that sometimes surprised even himself.

The time thus devoted to explanation has sufficed Dr. Cameron to get over the first greetings; to ward off as best he might the shower of small reproaches that assailed him on his entrance, and to subside into the easy-chair in which from time to time he had sat for the last ten years.

"Half an hour to spare, my dear Mrs. Leigh," he said, looking at his watch.

Mrs. Leigh at once launched forth into an enumeration of all her imaginary complaints.

"Oh, doctor, I was so very ill yesterday—odd flying pains that attacked every joint; and last night I had a sudden seizure—couldn't move in my bed; just such a case as I read in the papers—did you see it?—headed 'sudden death!' And then I wish to consult you about my head. I have often such curious pains that I cannot at all account for. My poor father died in a fit, you know; and this may in some way be connected with the extraordinary weakness of my eyesight, which now quite prevents my working or even reading by candle-light."

"Then on no account attempt candlelight occupation, or, if you do, wear spectacles—you will find them invaluable assistants."

"Now, doctor, that is really too cruel of you! It's all very fine for you men to talk so lightly of wearing spectacles; for you know very well that the greater the Guy you make of yourself, the more interesting we poor silly women shall think you. But that you should calmly

advise *me* to take to them!—no, doctor, I could never have thought you guilty of such premeditated cruelty to an old friend.”

The doctor seemed in no way touched by her reproaches; it is doubtful indeed whether he even heard her words; sitting in his favourite attitude, his hands folded over his stick and his chin resting upon them, he seemed lost in thought of no very pleasant nature, for his dark brows were drawn heavily over his eyes.

Mrs. Leigh grew impatient. “Lor’, doctor, whatever’s come to you to-day? You are in one of your unpleasant moods, I see, when there’s no getting anything out of you. But perhaps,” she added anxiously, “something I have said has alarmed you: you consider mine a serious case, and fear to tell me so; eh, doctor?”

Dr. Cameron looked up; but the dark shadow of a troubled thought still lay upon his face, as he answered, “I have just come from witnessing a very painful scene—a broken-hearted, motherless child clinging wildly to the dead father, who left home this morning in perfect health.”

“Dear me! how dreadful! Who?—where?—anyone I know?” The lady bent forward, eager and interested: for the moment all her own sufferings were forgotten. “Of what did he die?”

“A spasm of the heart.”

“The heart?” Mrs. Leigh pressed her hand convulsively to her left side and sank back into her chair. “Oh, doctor,” she gasped out with difficulty, “those words explain all—all my symptoms. Why did I not think of it before? Doctor,” she turned to him with the utmost solemnity, “deny it if you dare—I have something the matter with my heart!”

A strange smile quivered over the doctor’s lips, but his voice was perfectly grave as he said, “It would be useless to deny what I have known for the last two years.”

The poor lady gave a faint shriek, and sat staring blankly at the pitilessly hard face before her. To fancy

herself the victim of a heart-complaint was a new excitement; but to find her fancy a stern and cruel reality was a different thing altogether. "Doctor," she asked at last, "are you in earnest?"

"I was never more so, I assure you."

Mrs. Leigh was one of those fortunate individuals who can always give vent to their feelings in a flow of words, and the shock that had at first paralysed her tongue now set it going with hysterical rapidity. "I always knew—I felt that my days were numbered. And those dreadful dreams I have had lately were sent, I now see, as a warning. But to be cut off so suddenly—to-morrow—to-night—at this very hour; and my will not even made—so that those horrid Brands will come in for all my money. And, oh dear! I'm not prepared to die. Not that I have neglected my church duties—and the poor General was ever a liberal supporter of its charities; still I cannot say I have taken the same zealous interest in church matters since Mr. Vaughan left—there was always some pleasant religious excitement going on in his time; but, of course, had I but known that my end was so near——"

"You would have worked more zealously at that gorgeous banner, and those emblematic slippers that, begun for Mr. Vaughan, might have descended to Mr. Wright, had not his Low Church tendencies rendered him altogether unworthy of standing in his predecessor's shoes. But you may yet make up for lost time."

"Then you think there is still hope. Oh, doctor! I have such faith in you. I know that if anyone can cure me, it is you: you have already saved so many."

"Under God's blessing, yes; but hearts, like constitutions, vary, and two cases are never exactly the same. Yours I should pronounce to be starvation of the heart; for the heart requires nourishment equally with other parts of the body; and whereas one heart is small, narrow, and easily fed, the functions of another, larger and more expansive, if not properly filled, have

no fair play, and it will then contract—sometimes even close altogether. Such cases I have known end fatally.”

“And is there no remedy?”

“Yes, one, and only one—companionship.”

“Companionship?”

“Yes, indeed; try it, and I will answer for a perfect cure, not only of this malady, but of every other to which you have been subject since the poor General’s death.”

A suspicion of the truth, the glad and welcome truth, flashed upon Mrs. Leigh at these words. She seized the doctor’s hands rapturously. “You have been joking, you wicked, cruel man; you have said all this just to frighten me,—you know you have.”

“To frighten you into following the advice so often offered. You want companionship.”

“And where am I to find it? In the columns of the *Times*, where ladies offer their sympathy, services, talents, and friendship for the modest sum of 50*l.* per annum? *Merci pour rien*. I do not think the sympathy of some elderly spinster lady, too far gone even for governing, or, worse still, some mournful relict who, together with a devoted husband and better days, has buried all natural cheerfulness, worth 50*l.* per annum. The services of a lady’s maid you can have for less, and you can bully her into the bargain; but who could bully a relict who has known better days?”

“Is there no nephew or niece——”

“That I could adopt? Oh, half a dozen at least. There is a dashing young officer, a most interesting prodigal, who, having wasted his allowance for ten years to come in riotous living, would be glad enough to take up with the old woman, to see what she’s made of. And of course I should be just as great a fool as any other aunt who patronizes a dashing nephew: he’d soon coax me into making him my heir, and from that day forth I should be haunted by the uncomfortable thought that I had no right to go on living—that there was indeed something mean and shabby in my thus standing

in the way of the poor dear prodigal and his creditors. And as for my nieces, tell me frankly, doctor, you who know them, could any constitution stand such an infliction?"

"But are there not two orphan children to whom it would be a real charity to hold out a helping hand?" The doctor spoke softly and with deep feeling, but Mrs. Leigh flashed out upon him hot and angry—

"It is really cruel of you, doctor, in my delicate state of health to broach so unpleasant a subject. When my sister married her music-master, I disowned her and her children for ever. Had she lived, all might have ended differently; for after the poor dear General's death I felt very dull, and should have been glad of some new interest; but she died before the General, and I went into three months' mourning for her, and sent the husband 20*l.* for the erection of a proper monumental stone; but he was proud, forsooth, and returned it. Since that time I have heard nothing of him or his children; and I *will* hear nothing of them."

Without another word the doctor rose. Mrs. Leigh, now again all smiles, accompanied him to the door. "And you are sure, quite sure, dear doctor, that my heart is not affected?"

"I wish it were—in *one* way," he answered, with his quiet smile.

"Dear me!" sighed Mrs. Leigh, as she returned to her seat and rang for lights, "how the doctor frightened me! Well, it's best to be prepared for the end, and to be ready to die at peace with God and man. To-morrow, without fail, I shall see the lawyer about my will, those horrid Brands sha'n't get all the money the poor dear General left me. And that banner I was working for 'All Souls'—the doctor is right, I must finish it off at once. I'll drive in to Regent Street to match the silks, and at the same time I'll renew my subscription to the —— High Church Choral Society. These solemn warnings remind us of what we owe to God, and I certainly have been rather remiss lately. Ah! by-the-

bye, he never told me the dead man's name, after all. I wonder if I happened to know him, I mustn't forget to look in the *Times*; there'll be a full account of it there, for of course they'll have a coroner's inquest!"

CHAPTER VI.

DR. CAMERON had promised to see Winifred next day, and, accordingly, somewhere about noon his carriage stopped before the house, whose closed shutters had already attracted the curious gaze of many a passer-by. It was Mrs. Malloney herself who opened the door, and with much weeping and wringing of hands poured forth a volley of complaints. "Miss Winnie would not get up—would not eat or drink—would not see her poor father's friends or her poor father's corpse!" And oh, yer honour," she concluded, distractedly, "what if she should refuse to see you!"

"Has Dr. Hall been here to-day?"

"Yes, and sure he has; but wasn't it just as I said—she wouldn't so much as listen to what he had to say. It's no relation she has here, poor lamb; but the doctor's telegraphed to Miss Burns, who's Miss Winifred's mother's aunt. But Scotland's a long way off, I'm thinking, and——"

"We're wasting time, my good woman; take me to your young mistress at once."

"And not telling her first that you're here, sir?"

"That is quite unnecessary."

The woman stared aghast at the boldness of the step; but there was no opposing that strange doctor's will, so she led the way upstairs.

At the bedroom door he paused, to ask, in a low voice, whether Miss Morgan were not, perhaps, asleep.

Nurse shook her head, and, turning the handle very softly, he entered.

Winifred lay quite still, her face to the wall. Not the

faintest movement betrayed a consciousness of the doctor's presence; not even when he bent over her so low that his breath stirred her hair.

"Nurse," he said gently, but in a very decided tone, "have my orders been obeyed? Has Miss Morgan had the nourishment I prescribed for her?"

"Och, yer honour, and it's not a morsel has passed her lips this blessed day."

"Make her at once a strong cup of tea and a slice of dry toast."

Mrs. Malloney disappeared, muttering despairingly, "He'll find it pretty hard to make her mind, I'm thinking."

What then was her surprise to find Winifred, on her return, sitting up in bed, carefully wrapped in shawls, and actually talking to the doctor,—querulously and brokenly, it is true; but as they were the first connected sentences she had spoken since her father's death, nurse hailed them joyfully.

The doctor himself took the cup from the nurse's hand and held it out to Winifred, but she pushed it from her with the quick, impatient gesture of a child. "I can't take anything—indeed, indeed, I can't," she said, half peevishly, half entreatingly.

"Yes, you can, and *must*."

She looked up into his face, and something she read there seemed to awe her into instant submission; for she took the cup without another word, and returned it to him empty.

"That's right," he said approvingly, and with one of his rare smiles; then he cut the toast into dainty little strips, and held them out to her one by one until all were gone.

He next proposed her getting up, but she interrupted him at the first words, speaking with passionate vehemence—

"I can't get up and go about the house as if nothing had happened, when I know how awful a thing has happened; and the house is all so dark, and every one

will insist upon coming in to me and talking of *it*—always, always of it—and I couldn't bear it. I should go mad; I know I should."

And as if afraid of being forced up against her will, she crouched down into the bed, drawing the counterpane over her head.

Dr. Cameron turned to Mrs. Malloney. "Miss Morgan will get up presently," he said, "but she is not to leave her room, nor is anyone to intrude upon her—*anyone*, do you understand?"

"Yes, yer honour."

"I have now other visits to pay; in an hour I shall be back, and expect to find your mistress on the sofa. For the present, then, good bye."

"Good bye," echoed a low voice from under the counterpane.

In giving his orders Dr. Cameron never for a moment doubted their being obeyed, and he was right; on his return he found Winifred on the sofa. She gave him a half smile, and held out her hand. It was a white little hand, very soft and warm to the touch, and he did not relinquish it as he took a seat beside her; on the contrary, he held it closely, though gently in his broad palm.

"You are better now, the little change will do you good," he said, in his softest voice—and he could make his voice very soft indeed.

"Better!" she repeated, in a tone that was more weary than sad, "it would have been better had I died with poor papa."

The doctor spoke to her long and soothingly, but without apparent effect. There was something, indeed, either in the young girl's nature, or the peculiar horror of her grief, that repelled both sympathy and consolation; and this, together with a strange wild look almost of terror, that quivered over the lips, and lay with deeper intensity in the eyes, that, large, long, and of a pale, uncertain blue, moved restlessly beneath the dark lash, never stationary, but wandering incessantly with a vague,

unquiet motion, made her an object of peculiar interest and speculation to the man who, watching her intently from under his beetling brows, wondered how one so young, tender, and apparently helpless came to be so utterly friendless; no mother, sister, brother, or even loving friend, to replace him who now lay below in the darkened chamber, so utterly regardless of her forlorn position.

"Is there no one," he asked at last, "whom you would like to see—no one in whom you have confidence, and who would be a comfort to you in your loneliness?"

"Oh no."

"Poor child." He said this almost involuntarily, and with a very troubled look in his grey eyes; but any further attempt at consolation was prevented by Mrs. Malloney, who whispered in the doctor's ear that Mr. Hall was below and wished to speak with him. He rose to go, but before doing so he bent one moment over the young girl, and still holding her hand said a few words of religious peace and comfort; reminding her of the one Friend that each may claim for his own, who bore our griefs and carried our burden, and will bear and carry them unto the end. Very simple words they were, but he doubted whether she understood them, for there was no response either of word or look; the hand he released fell heavily to her side, and this time she did not even echo his good-bye.

Nurse Malloney followed him out of the room to receive his parting instructions, to which she listened as to the voice of her father confessor, for her confidence in him was unbounded. "Above all," were his last words, "guard well your mistress's door, and let no one intrude upon her; all painful excitement must be avoided."

"Faith, then, and if it's St. Patrick himself wants to get in I'll bar the door against him, craving his reverence's pardon, and telling him it's the doctor's orders."

Little did either think what was involved in that pro-

mise—little did the doctor think when he slept that night the sleep of the blessed, how far one person at least was from blessing him.

This person was none other than Miss Deborah Burns, who, that same night at 9. 30 p. m., reached the house in Belgrave Square, that had never before been honoured with her presence; for London was to Miss Burns very much what Egypt must have been in ancient times to the pious Jew, a den of folly, idolatry, and all uncleanness. Yet prompt to the call of duty, she had at once, on the receipt of the telegram, bidden a tender adieu to her poultry-yard, just then especially endeared to her by the advent of a brood of cochin-china chickens and yellow ducklings—to her favourite sow and its litter of curly tailed piglings—to her dovecots—to Jeannie Deans, the most famous mouser for miles round—and to the four great watch-dogs, which last, however, shared far less of her favour, from their being, unfortunately for them, of the male sex! For Miss Deborah regarded this matter from her own particular point of view, deeming that sex the noblest and most worthy of consideration that peoples the world, and reproduces its own image from generation to generation.

Very cruel was even this temporary separation from her model farm, but it was sweetened to her by the thought of the absolute authority with which her relationship to Winifred would invest her—and authority was at all times sweet to Miss Deborah. There was the funeral and mourning to arrange, and the whole household to pass in review and put under orders—for what could a child of seventeen know about such things!

It was dark when she reached Belgrave Square, and the cabman's sharp clang rang dismally through the silent house. The general look of astonishment that greeted her was a great source of secret pride and gratification to the good Scotch spinster lady evidently, she had not been expected that night.

Mrs. Malloney broke out into lamentations and self-reproaches because she had deferred preparing a room

till the next day; but Miss Deborah cut her very short—and short and sharp were her orders. She would see the corpse first, and her niece afterwards.

But here the Irishwoman's soft low voice expressed the further regret that Miss Winnie was ill and broken-hearted, and could see no one.

"No one! not her sole female relative, her mother's own aunt, come all the way from Scotland; was the woman daft?" Miss Burns's contemptuous indignation was too great for words, but there was something portentous in the repetition of the words, "the corpse first," accompanied by a defiant sniff. The gas had not been lighted in the hall, so nurse took a tall wax-light from the table, and led the way upstairs.

"And if you please, ma'am, here's the room."

Miss Burns nodded.

They had reached a door at the further end of the passage; nurse turned the key and entered softly. Quite inaudible was her light and cautious tread over the rich carpet; but Miss Deborah wore thick, country shoes laced up the middle with leathern thongs, and they creaked unmercifully; while no feeling of reverential awe made her tread more lightly when entering the immediate presence of the dead. To her a corpse was simply a corpse—a lifeless body robbed of the spirit, if the defunct happened to be of the number of the elect she pictured—with much inward satisfaction it must be owned, at being herself still numbered among the living—as seated on a cloudy throne adorned with a golden crown, of weight proportioned to his merits, and singing to his harp through all eternity with a force and energy—the great reward of his immortality! Not that in this particular instance however, she indulged in any such airy visions; Philip Morgan's salvation she regarded as more than doubtful, for though she had not seen him for eighteen years, he had, at the time of his courtship, expressed religious opinions that had set the good aunt's hair on end—and then, he was Irish! And what good

thing could ever come for Miss Deborah out of that land of Fenianism and Popery?

"And would you see the face, ma'am?" asked Nurse Malloney, hushing her voice to a whisper.

Miss Burns nodded once more, and very reverently nurse removed the light cambric handkerchief. All trace of the strange, startled look, detected by the doctor the day before, had disappeared, the features, calm, rigid, and stony, were expressive of nothing but the most solemn repose.

"Hem," was Miss Deborah's sole comment, and nurse softly replaced the handkerchief.

"Disease of the heart, eh?" observed Miss Deborah, as soon as they were fairly out, and the door closed.

"So the doctors say, ma'am."

No more was said until they reached the hall, when Miss Burns, facing sharply round upon her astonished guide, said abruptly, "Now, my niece—"

"And begging your pardon, ma'am, Miss Winifred must see no one, it's the doctor's orders."

"Doctor's orders, fiddlesticks! A pretty doctor certainly, to tell you to lock the door in the face of the child's own aunt."

"Sure and wern't these the doctor's own words, 'Mrs, Malloney, if St. Patrick himself tries to get in, just you bar the door in his face.'"

"And serve him right too!—him and the whole pack of them," was the grim answer; "but I'm not St. What's-his-name, and there's no one'll keep *me* out."

"Keep you out? And who'd be for keeping you out? And you Miss Winnie's own mother's aunt, as I told the doctor, and poor Miss Winnie, who's just dying to see you; but isn't she just now in such a beautiful sleep, and the doctor himself, who said to me, 'Mrs. Malloney, you get the poor crittur to sleep, and if you let any one awake her, I'll not answer for the consequences, she's as likely as not to get a fever on the spot—typhus, or brain, or——'"

"Why bless the woman," interrupted Miss Burns,

impatiently, "why didn't you say at once that my niece was asleep and so end the matter; but, like all your countrywomen, your tongue's a mile too long. I'll see her the first thing to-morrow; meanwhile, show me up to my room, and bring me at once a cup of tea, strong, but no green mind, and a mutton chop cooked on the gridiron. And by-the-bye, are you sure that the bed is well aired?"

"Faith, and it's I myself have slept in it for the last week."

(Oh, Mrs. Malloney, Mrs. Malloney, what will your father confessor say to that ingenious little fib!)

"And the sheets?"

"Why, then, haven't they been on my own bed for the last month, for then as I say they're always ready, and there's no knowing who may drop in all of a minute."

Drop in, indeed! Poor Miss Deborah was like to drop, and it was with difficulty she got out the monosyllable "What!" Nor was she in any way pacified by the discovery that the sheets destined for her use, had not been slept *in* but *over*; nurse being in the habit of systematically airing one pair somewhere between the mattress and under blanket, so as to be "always ready," a plan that if universally followed would for ever insure the public against damp sheets. Miss Burns safely double locked in her room, and all her wants duly satisfied, nurse hurried off to her young mistress, and stooping softly over her, whispered, mysteriously, "She's come, my darling!"

"Who?"

"The old woman from Scotland! but knowing the sight of her ugly face would just half kill you, I kept her away—for all she put herself in such a rage; and I've got her off to bed, and she shan't come worrying you, my beauty, at least till the doctor's been; no, not if I've to guard your door as the angel guarded Paradise."

Nurse's intentions were heroic, but unfortunately, at no time an early riser, on this particular night, worn out

with excitement, she slept later even than usual. Miss Deborah, on the contrary, whom no excitement kept either awake or asleep, was up at five, and in her niece's room at six. There nurse found her.

"The old serpent!" she muttered, irefully, "she's got in after all;" and she was but half consoled by the reflection that though the angel found it an easy matter to expel our first parents, "poor critturs, who hadn't a rag to their back or a stick to defend themselves with, he never tried it on with the Devil himself, not he!"

"She's come, sir," were her first words to Dr. Cameron, who arrived about noon.

"Who's she?"

"The old lady from Scotland, yer honour, and she's got in to Miss Winnie, and is just worrying her to death."

When Dr. Cameron entered Winifred's room he found no old lady there. Winifred was alone, but he noticed with some alarm a crimson flush upon her cheek and a strange unquiet light in her great eyes. She held out her hand almost eagerly, and as he seated himself at her side, she breathed a deep sigh, as it seemed to him, of relief. Evidently she was glad to see him, and as he spoke to her kindly and soothingly, the flush died gradually out of her cheek, but her eyes still moved uneasily from time to time towards the door.

"You are expecting some one," he said at last.

"I am so frightened," was the somewhat irrelevant answer, spoken in a whisper.

"Of what?"

She drew a long breath and glanced once more at the door before she answered. "Of Aunt Deborah; she says I must see poor papa again before they nail down the coffin, I *must*, and that it is wicked and cruel of me to refuse. Do you think it wicked and cruel?"

"But why should the thought frighten you?"

"Why? because it was so dreadful, oh so dreadful! that I am sure I shall never forget it—never to my dying day—it was so white and cold, so cold that I have not

been warm since—not for one moment; and now there's the shroud and the coffin, and when I close my eyes it's always before me, and in my sleep I feel it lying here, always *here!*” and shuddering convulsively, she pressed her hands over the breast that had pillowed the dead man's head.

Dr. Cameron was both shocked and pained, and he answered, gravely, “Your aunt spoke in kindness, my child, thinking it would be a comfort to you to look once more on the loved face, before the coffin lid hides it from you for ever.”

“Oh, no, she didn't say it in kindness, I'm sure, but only to frighten me. Will you tell her I needn't see it?” she asked, turning eagerly to the doctor.

He paused; but the flush was deepening upon the little face, and he gave the promise—but added, with solemn earnestness as he took the small hot hand in his, and for a moment arrested the wandering eyes, “When you recall the father who so loved you, my poor child, it should not be in the stillness and helplessness of death, but as you have ever known him, kind and good: memories such as these are sweet, and free from terror.” Just then a heavy decided step was heard ascending the stairs, the door opened, and Dr. Cameron rose to greet Miss Morgan's sole female relative.

“Miss Deborah!”

“James Cameron!”

The recognition was mutual, and what was the doctor's astonishment to find in this terrible old lady from Scotland, whose presence had so unnerved his poor little patient, his old friend, Miss Deborah Burns, whose prime favourite he had been ever since the time that as a wild, headstrong schoolboy, still sporting the Highland kilt and riding a Highland pony, he had often taken her by storm, preferring the freedom of Dunweanie Farm to the harsh restraint of his own home. Since the day, however, that as a proud, unyielding boy, he had been turned from his father's door, and, cast remorselessly adrift upon the world, because he chose to follow a beggarly profession,

instead of entering the army as befitted a Cameron, they had never met. But recognition was easy enough on his side, for Miss Burns had not altered by a day. There was the same stiff upright figure, the same quaint, old-fashioned attire, the same frank open eye and hard puckered mouth—no, she had not altered by a day—and he? Miss Deborah rubbed her eyes to make sure that she had not been deceived by the familiar voice. Who, in this tall, grave man, with the stooping shoulders, and the deep far-seeing eyes, would have recognised the Jamie Cameron of Lochcairn? As she seized both his hands in her iron grip, her wrath was at once transferred from the insolent London doctor, who had ordered her to be kept out of her niece's room, to the insolent Irishwoman, who had repeated that order, and on her it settled unalterably.

Dr. Cameron kept his promise to Winifred, and left the house promising to call again in a day or two; but this promise he did not redeem, nor did he ever again enter that ill-omened house!

Several important cases occupied him exclusively for the next few days, after which he received a pressing summons to attend a certain Lady Wynn, who lived in a distant county, and who after having, to the despair and amazement of her lord and her lord's family, presented them with seven daughters, had once more thrown them into an agony of expectation.

Sir Peter Wynn was not by nature devoid of reason, but such a position as his would make shipwreck of any man's keener intelligence. Had he not, in obedience to the orders of the family, taken to himself a wife, that she might give to the house of Wynn a son and heir? and now, where was the heir? Though not of opinion in his more sober moments, that doctors are, in the abstract, influential in bringing forth heirs, he certainly did prefer on these important occasions enlisting the services of some noted member of the medical profession, who had, within the year, attended some noted lady, safely delivered of a male child; and Dr. Cameron, having

been lately most fortunate in that respect, received a summons to Wynn Hall, was sumptuously entertained by the father expectant, who was suffering all the tortures of alternate hope and fear, remained to see Lady Wynn happily through her troubles, to assure the anxious husband that both mother and child were doing well, remarkably well, and to congratulate him upon the birth of an eighth daughter! Then having received his fee—the value of which, when compared with what it might have been, reminds me of the comparative estimate of life in Austria, twenty-five florins for the saviour of a man or boy, twelve for the saviour of a young woman, and six for the saviour of an old one—he hurried back to London. As his keen eye glanced rapidly down the crowded platform, it fell upon a little figure at the further end, that he thought he recognised. A little figure so heavily draped in mourning, that it seemed literally to droop beneath the load. There was crape from the waist to the ground—not an inch beyond it, the presiding superintending genius having a horror of the fashionable train—from the throat to the knees in the form of a cape, from the crown of the bonnet to the waist in the form of a veil. Very motionless it stood, apparently mounting guard over a monster pile of luggage.

The doctor quickened his usually slow pace. Yes, he was right—from out the heavy crape platings of the bonnet glimmered a little white face, two great restless eyes, and a delicately formed mouth, whose downward curve imparted to it an expression half sad, half peevish.

“Miss Morgan!”

She started, and uttered a little cry; “Oh, is it you? How you frightened me!”

“Indeed! that was far from my intention, I assure you; seeing you thus mounting guard, I hoped to be of service in the defence of your property; but where’s Miss Burns?”

“Gone for tickets, I think; but she’s been ever so long, and I’m so tired of standing here, and I don’t

dare leave, for she said I was never to remove my eyes one moment for fear of some of the loose parcels being carried off. Oh, dear! I wonder which she calls the loose parcels—not those, I'm sure," and her eye wandered off to two large wooden chests; "for they're full of farming implements, and so heavy that the cabman refused to take them, and swore at aunt, and said he'd witness against her for cruelty to animals. And I'm so tired, and it's so warm here in the sun."

Dr. Cameron, notwithstanding her half-frightened remonstrance, led her away to a seat, and sat down beside her.

"But you have not yet accounted for being here," he said, presently. "Are you returning to Scotland with your aunt?"

"Yes, and I can't bear going; and aunt says that if I had been rich, as every one supposed I should be, she would have left me with friends in London, who would then have been very glad to have me. But all turned out so differently from what was expected; for after poor papa's death it was found that instead of being rich, as people thought, because he lived in Belgrave Square, and had carriages and an opera box, and other expensive things, there was nothing at all, or at least—I don't quite understand—but Aunt Deborah does, if you will ask her. Is Scotland very far from London?" she asked, changing the conversation abruptly.

"Nothing is far in these days of steam," answered the doctor, with a slight smile.

"But nurse told me that Scotland was such a *dreadful place*, only, as aunt says, as she was never there, she can know nothing about it."

"Certainly not. But where is the good woman? Why is she not here to look after you and the luggage?"

"Oh, aunt and she could never get on together. They were always quarrelling, and so she sent her away."

"Poor creature! the parting must have been a cruel one, she seemed so deeply attached to you."

"Yes; she nursed me from a baby, and she cried so dreadfully, and said she would jump into the Thames from London Bridge, only the good-for-nothing nephew she's always talking about would come in for all her savings."

"You must have been very sorry to lose her?"

"Oh, she was always very kind to me; but ever since papa died she did nothing but cry, and she always would talk of him, and it was so tiresome."

Something in the words and the tone in which they were said jarred painfully on the doctor's ear, and he bent a keen scrutinising look on the little face that had from the first awakened in him so great a pity. Very gentle, and pure, and girlish it was, every curve bespeaking a soft sensitive nature, not a harsh line in the whole, and yet something in her words had struck him as both harsh and heartless.

"Oh, there's Aunt Deborah!" she exclaimed, jumping up with another nervous start. "And she'll be so angry with me for deserting my post."

There could be no doubt of Miss Deborah's vicinity, for her voice reached them full of scorn and anger,—
"Well, things have come to a pretty pass! Here 'Bradshaw' says that a train leaves at 12.15, and you tell me there's none until 1-30!"

"But if you'd please to look here, ma'am, you'll see it with your own eyes."

"And with whose eyes did I see it in 'Bradshaw,' I should like to know? With yours, I suppose?"

The doctor had heard enough to convince him that his old friend was as usual in hot water, and he hastened to the rescue. The porter, with all due respect, pointed to his time-table. Miss Deborah, on the other hand, pointed to her 'Bradshaw.' Both were right! The doctor was fairly puzzled; he stroked his chin reflectively.

"You are sure," he said at last, "that your 'Guide' is for this month?"

Miss Deborah turned upon him as fiercely as she had just now done upon the porter "A 'Guide' for this month! A likely thing, certainly, that I should buy another when I'd one by me."

The porter scratched his head; the doctor turned to the title-page of Miss Deborah's 'Guide.' It dated back eighteen years!

"Well?" asked Miss Deborah, defiantly.

"Well," answered the doctor, gravely, "it cannot be denied that at no time were antiquities at a higher premium. A scrap of coffee-coloured lace, a fragment of grotesque china, a petrified centipede, or the thigh-bone of an antediluvian monster, is worth its weight in gold; but never, until to-day, did I imagine that any particular value could be attached to an old 'Bradshaw.'"

Miss Deborah fired up.

"Well, James, there's nothing to laugh at that I see, but you always were the most provoking fellow in the world. When I went up to London to the wedding of that child's parents eighteen years ago I bought a 'Bradshaw,' and how should I suppose people would take the trouble of writing and printing that great thick book only for one month! Why, on and off I've been eighteen years getting it by heart, and it's only good for one month! But that's just like you men—not a grain of common sense amongst you. And you are sure—quite sure," turning to the long-suffering porter, "that the train leaves at 1.30?"

Yes, he was quite sure; and that being settled, and there being still two hours to spare, she was advised to retire to the waiting-room, together with all the *loose packages*; but it was long before the combined efforts of doctor and porter could induce her to agree to this arrangement, and even then there yet remained the difficulty of deciding what should be comprehended under the category of "loose packages," she herself inclining to the opinion that all were more or less so. At last, however, the doctor, to his no small satisfaction,

saw the good lady comfortably seated with a wall of luggage on the right hand and on the left; then he took his leave.

Winifred accompanied him to the door.

As he stooped down to bid her good-bye—for she was a very little creature, and he wished to look into her face once more—he softened his voice as he only did when addressing the sorrowful or the dying,—“Good-bye! God bless you, my child! I shall not forget you in my prayers; and if ever you should need a true friend, you will find one in James Cameron. Here’s my card.”

She looked down at it, then up at him, giving him one of her wistful sidelong glances as she put her hand into his. “Good-bye,” she said, quietly; then added, after a pause, “I wish I were going with you, instead of going on to Scotland with Aunt Deborah.”

Very soft and warm lay her little hand in his, and somehow that little hand, so frail and childish, gave him a pain at his heart. He looked at her with a troubled expression, as if anxious to say something; but when James Cameron felt most, words were least at his command, so he only repeated the simple “Good-bye,” and left her. At the end of the platform he turned. She still stood at the waiting-room door, leaning against it in a rather disconsolate attitude. Something in the wistful expression of her face, her deep mourning, and forlorn position seemed to appeal to him, to recall him to her side, to entreat him not utterly to forsake her. And yet, what had he, the grave, stern man of science, whose youth had never been young, whose heart had never been warm, to do with that poor little Irish girl with the innocent, childish face! What have we any of us to do with our destiny? Our hand, it is true, may set in motion the mighty wheel that moves the whole machinery of our lives; but there our power ends, and the wheel moves on alone. Hidden from view are its workings, and how many a one, venturing but one step beyond the prescribed

limits, has been caught and crushed by the ruthless agency his own hand set in motion.

CHAPTER VII.

It was six months since the Rev. Cyril Thornton had entered upon his duties as second curate of a large and populous London district. Such a curacy had been the dream of his college life, and the hope of it had kept him hard at work when otherwise his robust health and fine animal spirits would have tempted him to excel in all the manly sports that, to his infinite surprise, he found to be so much more appreciated than proficiency in the dead languages. The sacrifice to ambition had been great, but how much greater seemed its reward—the summit of his proudest hopes—a London curacy! which appeared to him from two different, but equally attractive points of view—there was the great world, its patronage and applause, to satisfy his ambition; while in wrestling against its folly, vice, and extravagance, he would satisfy his conscience. An enthusiast and a visionary, he regarded his vocation not in the light of a profession, but a calling, believing himself the chosen of God, as was Aaron and Paul, and measuring himself by the ordinary standard of our clergy—too many of whom might as clerks, tradesmen, clowns, &c., do very well, but who, wrapped in the mantle of Elijah, look certainly awkward and out of place—he longed to gather its mighty folds about him, and show to a perishing world what could be done by an active, eloquent preacher. And now that opportunity was his—had been his for the last six months—how far was he up the ladder of fame? Alas for the dreams of youth!

There can be no doubt that genius is far less common in practice than in theory, in the real than in the ideal. How many a would-be great man deludes himself with the pleasing, but at the same time bitter belief,

that a fair opening alone is wanting to make him famous? And he may to a certain degree be right, for had fortune, together with her other gifts, endowed him with wealth, high interest, and indomitable perseverance—the last, perhaps the most indispensable gift of all—he might have done something. But, as such combinations of fortune are very rare, it requires a lucky accident, or a genius of no ordinary brilliancy, to make itself acknowledged. Embryo geniuses are legion—recognised geniuses how rare?

Cyril had fondly dreamt that it needed but a London curacy to make him famous. Let us now look at him as he crosses the wet, sloshy road on his way home after a hard day's work. Home, did I say! Well, are not those dreary, black-looking houses down the dreary, black-looking streets, the homes of thousands, and why not his? Perhaps it is the weariness of the day that gives such a heaviness to the once-elastic step, such an air of dejection to the handsome but somewhat jaded face?

We cannot also help noticing, as he stands under his dripping umbrella, waiting in all the resignation of despair for the slip-shod maid-of-all-work to open the street-door, that his coat has certainly lost its first lustre, and has about it a thin melancholy gloss, telling of hard wear. Something, too, there is in the cut of his hair, the overgrowth of his whiskers, and the limpness of his shirt collar, that bespeaks self-neglect and a despondent state of mind.

Sarah, who, as her mistress, the landlady, would say, is in one of her tantrums, keeps him waiting longer than usual; and as he stands, now on one leg, now on the other, he sighs wearily. Yet he administers no sharp reproof to the sooty damsel, who at last appears, but only repeats the daily question,—“Any letters to-day?”

Yes, one awaits him in his dingy room, and it seems at once to fill every corner with light and sunshine. It is wet and cold here in London—the streets are almost impassable—the pavement slippery and greasy, and the

hard-worked, ill-paid curate is sick at heart; and yet, as he reads of golden sunsets—as he is reminded of pleasant strolls down shady lanes—in deep woods, or along the sunny river-banks—the present, with its load of petty cares and worries, vanishes as if by enchantment—every harsh line is smoothed from his brow—he feels no longer worn or jaded; he feels no longer sad and lonely either, for every word of the letter breathes love, and hope, and courage.

Dear, simple, wise, little Mary, once more your tender woman's hand gives to the man you love something better than life; for it gives him—hope!

As he returns the letter to its envelope, out drops a spray of jasmine, still sweet, and, though crushed, not dead. How well he knows from whence the little flower was taken! It grows in wild luxuriance up the front wall of the old farm-house—right up into Mary's window. And no doubt as she wrote its perfume stole around her, and thinking of poor Cyril, in his dark, cheerless London lodgings, she gathered one sweet spray, and sent it with a sigh and a blessing, to comfort him in his loneliness.

These are Cyril's reflections, reader, not mine. For Cyril is both romantic and poetic, and though the strong, active, sun-burnt lass is hardly an interesting subject for poetic rhapsodies, imagination can gild the roughest metal; and so, sitting before the dead ashes of his cheerless grate, for he had forgotten to bid Sarah relight his fire, he let thought wander on and on, until, beginning with Cousin Mary, it ended with himself, when he moralised thus:—

“Strange, restless beings that we are, so finite, and yet ever craving for the Infinite! Is this yearning of ours a curse or a blessing?—the brand of man's fall or the halo of his divine nature? Should we be happier—should we be better—if each could say to his own wayward heart, So far and no farther? May it not be an angel's hand that troubled the waters? and if so, shall aught less mighty than the voice of God command the

raging elements be still, and be obeyed! What subtle instinct, strong and irresistible as death, made me see in myself one destined to a nobler, higher life than that which satisfies Hal—that made all seem so irksome and unprofitable—all that now in memory appears so beautiful!—that made me ready for every sacrifice, strong to surmount every difficulty, resist every temptation. And can this, indeed, be the end of all—this, and nothing beyond! Must I ever remain a cypher, when a voice from my soul speaks to me, bidding me be up and doing—fighting, wrestling, conquering—that I may have some account to render for the ten talents committed to my charge, for there *are* ten talents! The world may misjudge and despise me, but the ten talents are there—I know it, and God knows it, too!”

So muses Cyril; and leaving him to his own bitter and humiliating reflections, we will see what his position really is.

Unfortunately, in his dream of a London curacy, he had no idea of the difference that exists between the West and East End; and in this latter region had he found himself on his arrival in the great city. The parish was a large one, and every Sunday morning the handsome church was well filled with gaily dressed people whose motives for attending divine worship we will not criticise. But in this service Cyril took no part, for there were two above him—first and foremost, Mr. Cheerman, a large, heavy man, who for twenty years had held the living of St. Stephen's, and was never so happy as when, arrayed in his stiff silk robes—the gift of his loving congregation—he listened to his own pompous diction, full-rounded sentences, profusely sprinkled with Latin quotations, that were certainly imposing. It cannot be said that Mr. Cheerman was either a handsome, clever, interesting, or even a remarkably good man, and yet he was universally popular—with the male portion of his congregation, because he was moderate, and by no means a clerical beggar; for, himself a foe to all reforms, leaving everything much as he found it, he had no need

of extra calls upon the pockets of his flock. Then, too, he won their hearts by the frank confession of a partiality for suppers and the social glass.

With the married ladies he was popular, because, though a confirmed old bachelor, he never failed to notice the children, nor—which is still more remarkable—did he ever forget their respective names and ages, distinguishing in the most subtle manner between Bob and Bobby, Betsey and Bess.

The young ladies, of course adored him—firstly, because they adore all clergymen, and secondly, because, though a very superior being in their eyes, he was not above a sly compliment and a sly joke.

But, besides Mr. Cheerman, the Great Mogul, before whom bowed all the faithful of St. Stephen's, there was the lesser but still burning and shining light—the first curate, Mr. Lamb.

This gentleman had a large black beard, a lisp, a very short sight, and a very long neck. All the ladies pronounced him a most elegant young man, and with this opinion he perfectly agreed; for of all his admirers, and he had many, the greatest was undoubtedly himself.

Unfortunately for the popularity of the second curate, whose really handsome person might otherwise have gained him a monopoly of favour, Mr. Lamb, besides his elegant figure, had a private income, handsome apartments, was very genteelly born, and had expectations; whereas it was soon discovered that poor Cyril was only a farmer's son, and very poor of course, or he would not live in such a shabby-lodging; and Mr. Lamb, having once observed that there was certainly something common and country-bred about the young man, all who took their clue from him—and who did not?—feared to compromise themselves by showing favour to the second curate, who, however, was well thought of by the incumbent, as being conscientious and quite fitted for his work—as was Mr. Lamb, no doubt, for his, which consisted in paying a regular round of visits to the

wealthiest houses, attending all christening and wedding parties, and performing the evening service.

This evening service it was that inverted the first curate with so bright a halo—connecting him with music, gas, and moonlight walks home, all which things are so very romantic, and appeal so powerfully to the hearts of young ladies.

The second curate's work was of a different kind altogether. His visits were to the low slums and alleys of the district, the haunts of vice and disease, the hunting-ground of pestilence, famine, and self-murder; and it was here, amid the dark places of the earth, that Cyril alone found interest and encouragement. Innumerable, indeed, were the difficulties with which he had to contend—the fierce looks and words, even to threats, that he had to encounter—the mortifications, disappointments, and brutal ignorance, that beset him on every side. One old woman shut her doors upon him because he had ventured to offer her a soup-ticket, instead of money; another grossly insulted him, because, pitying her destitute condition and daily black eyes, he had extracted from the husband a promise to stay quietly at home and not spend all his money at the public-house; a third, hitherto a regular church-goer, migrated, with her whole family, to the dissenting chapel, because her children had received less valuable Christmas gifts than those of a poorer neighbour. An interesting prodigal, too, in whom Cyril had centred many bright hopes, from the copious draughts of Scripture he let out with every breath, proved an unmitigated rascal—well known to the police. Still there were occasional gleams of promise, rare but all the more touching instances of true repentance; holy examples of patient suffering and saintly piety, that more than repaid him for all. In them he saw “of the travail of his soul, and was satisfied.”

Other duties, however, he had which were far less to his taste—the care of the schools, for instance. Oh, those schools! which were to the strong man as great a bugbear as “Wellington is to babes and sucklings.” The

boys, though as ill-conditioned a set as could well be found, he managed tolerably well; but the girls!—the giggling, pert, audacious girls—who stared him out of countenance, and of whom he was much more afraid than they were of him; and worse, far worse than scholars, boys or girls, were the lady Sunday-school teachers—most of them young, many of them pretty, but all terrible to the shy, country-bred curate as an army of fiery dragons. They made life a burden to him, and seriously undermined his nervous system. Soon he ceased to regard them individually, but as a body, like the mythological monster from whose head sprang all the serpents that infest the world.

As a body, they beset his path and his door, charged with important school business. If at any time he happened to enter the school-room later than usual, when all were assembled, he would turn hot and cold, and completely lose his self-possession; because he knew that as a body they were regarding him. Whenever he had aught to communicate to the body—which was seldom the case, as this part of his responsibility he transferred to Mr. Algernon Lamb, who was nothing loth to relieve him of it—he invariably applied to the plainest and least juvenile, and so persistently did he select her at all meetings, school-feasts, or charitable bazaars, that he at last found himself accused of making up to old Miss Wynneth, because she had money; so that even this poor comfort was denied him.

Once, when called upon to address the children he had prepared for confirmation, though he had made his exhortation the subject of much thought and even prayer, the sudden agonising reflection that the eyes of the body were upon him so upset him, that he broke down irretrievably, and was glad of the support of the first curate, who at once spoke long and fluently; and if the youthful mind grasped but one word out of twenty, the ladies were much edified, and thus, Mr. Lamb's object in speaking was gained. From that day forward Cyril's oratorical powers were not called forth in the schools. "Poor

young man, he was, of course, quite unequal to anything of the kind; visiting among the poor was more in his line. Somehow, he seemed to get on better with them than Mr. Lamb, who was altogether too superior a person for such work."

Such was the general fiat.

And did Cyril, then, never mount the pulpit? Had he never the opportunity so ardently desired of "proving to a perishing world what could be done by an eloquent preacher of the gospel?" Yes, to a part of the world—his world of St. Stephen's—he preached Sunday after Sunday; to a few old parish women, a dozen nursemaids, about half-a-dozen small children, and a light sprinkling of conscientious housemaids, who really did go to church, according to their mistresses' command, instead of promenading in the parks or lanes with a soldier-cousin; for to the second curate was entrusted the performance of the afternoon service—at all times but poorly attended, but by the respectabilities of St. Stephen's never attended at all. In the summer, the paterfamilias, always a City man, ordered out the gig, and filling it with as many members of the family as it could conveniently or inconveniently hold, started off to Kew, Richmond, &c. In the winter, there was the heavy Sunday dinner to digest, which could only be happily accomplished by a regular Sunday nap, the gentleman taking to the arm-chair and newspaper, the lady to the sofa and a good book; and while thus they slumbered peacefully, and the young girls, up in their own rooms, gossiped of balls and partners, or wrote love-letters, Cyril preached to the housemaids; and, moreover, he conscientiously brought his mind down to their level, never attempting to raise theirs to his or talking to them as to high intellectual beings, conversant with Greek and Latin, the old Fathers and abstract theology, but as fellow-creatures who have lives to live, wounds to heal, and souls to save; and all heard him gladly, the housemaid sometimes even inducing the soldier-cousin to accompany her to church rather than lose the sermon. And who shall say that some of

the simple, earnest words heard then may not have sunk deep into their hearts, guarding them in the hour of temptation, comforting them in the hour of sorrow?

So work on, Cyril, in hope and faith, keeping as now the religion pure and undefiled before God and the Father, visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keeping yourself unspotted from the world.

CHAPTER VIII.

How can we best see a man? By this I do not mean see him to the best advantage, for that must depend upon the individual himself. One shows to most advantage at a ball, another at a wedding, a third at a funeral, a fourth on the summit of Mont Blanc or the Pyramids, a fifth on his tombstone. But how can we best see a man so as to see him as he really is?—undoubtedly at his own fireside; and therefore do I ask the reader to accompany me to one of the dullest-looking houses in Russell Square, where we shall find Dr. Cameron seated before his blazing hearth, his old grey terrier stretched at his feet, and both indulging, as was their wont, in a quiet after-dinner meditation.

And sitting thus, his head drooped forward, his chin resting on his hand—that hand so strong to save, so gentle to soothe—and the red firelight playing fitfully over the stern thoughtful features, he would make no uninteresting study, at least for those whose interest is not confined to mere beauty of outline, for of this he cannot boast,—tall and gaunt of form, with high stooping shoulders, and a true Scotch ruggedness of feature that suggested the idea of his face having been hewn out of some rough block of granite hard and cold. It was only when he smiled, which he very rarely did, that you got an insight into the gentler part of his character; but as he chiefly reserved his smiles for the sick, the suffering, and the wretched, to whom his face thus il-

lumined was as the face of an angel, ordinary mortals pronounced him ugly.

"Ugly!" was Mrs. Leigh's indignant exclamation to an acquaintance who had applied the term to her old friend; "what face would not be redeemed from ugliness by such eyes as those!"

Remarkable eyes they certainly were, full of a stern almost mesmeric power. Power indeed was the chief characteristic of the whole man, felt by all, resented by many. For James Cameron was far too unsocial to be popular; intimate he was with no one, hospitality he neither accepted nor offered, and thus his private life, as his private feelings, was a sealed book even for those he called his friends.

Another and very remarkable circumstance was, that though still young, being only, at the time I write of, between thirty and forty—already famous, and with a brilliant career before him—he had never been the object of matrimonial speculation. Young ladies stood in the greatest awe of him; even the most coquettish never tried their arts upon the cold taciturn doctor, and would as soon have thought of making secret or open love to him, as of hugging the great polar bear at the Zoological Gardens.

The mothers had all agreed from the first that he was not a marrying man, and that any attempt to catch him would be waste of time and energy; so the attempt had never been made—no! not by the boldest and most desperate of match-makers. But what of the widows? asks the reader.

A man may rise triumphant over a thousand perils—perils of the race-course, perils of the *demi-monde*, perils of coquettes, perils of mothers; but the peril of fascinating widows?

Well, somehow he managed to resist even them; and so went on his lonely way, immersed in his profession, never pausing amid the burthen and heat of the day to ask himself whether life had nothing for him but work—no sweeter joys that might yet be his if he would but put forth his hand to grasp them.

Very drear and unhomelike did his house appear to strangers; but he had lived there fourteen years, and was attached to it. In vain did officious friends urge the necessity of his removing to a more fashionable quarter; he thanked them by a bow for their advice, and renewed the seven years' lease of No. —, Russell Square. "What would Grace Ingles, the doctor's foster-mother, and housekeeper ever since he had had a house to keep, with her Scotch love of gloom and quiet, have said to Belgrave Square?" And Grace's influence was paramount, being the only female influence in the house.

Yet this had not always been. Five years before the date of our story, another power, sweet, gentle, unobtrusive, had stolen noiselessly into the dull old house—a power that even Grace herself could not resent; for was not Lucy the master's own and only sister? who, being little more than a baby at the time he had left home, had faded entirely out of his life until the stern old father's death reminded him that he had a sister, and her that she had a brother and another home. Hand in hand they stood at the open grave of the man whose severity had blighted their young lives, and robbed them of what after-years, however prosperous, could never restore to them—the glory of their youth! For neither James Cameron nor his sister had ever been young. And yet Lucy's tears fell fast, and in all sincerity she mourned that buried life; perhaps too she mourned the old home she was about to leave, with all its childhood's associations. If so, no one ever guessed it: at her father's grave she placed her hand in that of her brother, and to that hand she clung unto the end.

In the grey dawn of a dull autumn day, when heavy mists were rolling darkly over mountain and loch, she looked her last at the old home; that true emblem of the old life, already lay behind her wrapped in silence and in shadow. In the grey twilight of a dull autumn day, when a heavy fog hung damp and chill over the London streets, she reached her brother's house. On

its threshold he kissed and blessed her and bade her welcome *home*. Poor Lucy!

From that day forth all went on as usual in Russell Square, and the doctor's life was in no way changed by the advent of his sister—at least so said the world; but the world was wrong, as it very often is; for whereas feelings have far more to do with a man's real life than mere outward circumstances, though the *doctor's* life had not changed, the *man's* life had. He was no longer alone; some one there was to greet him on his return with soft smiles and shy caresses, to sit beside him in the grim Presbyterian chapel, joining her young voice to his in prayer and praise—to call him Jamie, the dear old name that a mother's lips had hallowed, and to sing to him in the gloaming the simple Scotch ballads he had only heard in his childhood and his dreams. Yes, James Cameron's life had changed—and Lucy's?

Had you asked her, she would have said she was the happiest of sisters, and Jamie the kindest of brothers—dear Jamie! Had he ever given her a harsh word, an unkind look? Was he not the noblest, the gentlest, the most generous of beings?—if only she could do something to repay him for all he had done for her! This thought it was, the thought of her utter uselessness, that saddened her gentle spirit more than a greater trial would have done. Her father, it is true, had been a stern unloving parent, but in his last years of feebleness and suffering she had been allowed to nurse and cheer him, and this holy duty had satisfied every yearning of her young heart. But here in her new home she had no place, she had no mission; and what good woman is happy without? Grace Ingles managed the house; and what did James, so strong, independent, and self-absorbed, want with her love or care? Aimless and useless, with no interest for her present, no past or future for her dreams, life was to her a blank. Unhappy she was not, but there are conditions of life worse even than unhappiness.

For two years she wandered about the house, a pale little shadow, wondering in her utter self-depreciation why

all were so good and kind to her, wondering too, perhaps, why she had ever been born. If sometimes, though vaguely, she half realized how different was her life from that of other girls of her age, she shrank from the thought in bitter self-reproach, never allowing it to herself, how much less to others. Could she but have guessed how dear she was to the stern, silent brother, for whose love she so passionately yearned, her life would have been very different; but she guessed nothing. Young, timid, weakly, with her pure heart weaned from earth, and so often fixed on heaven, it seemed such a much easier thing to die than live; and so gradually, day by day, her cheek grew paler, her voice lower, her step more languid. Yet no one noticed the change, and least of all the brother, whose step on the stairs would flush her cheek, and kindle her eye. "Poor fellow," she thought, "when he has so many wearing anxieties abroad, it would be cruel indeed to treat him to dull looks at home." If she suffered, it was in silence; in silence too she bore Grace's severe lectures upon the little interest she now took in the coarse garments, for the poor, with which her work-table was so liberally provided.

It was only when in her own room, safe from every eye, that she gave way to the deadly languor that was worse than pain. Then, with her thin arms thrown around Tip's rough shaggy neck, she would lie for hours—not grieving, not even thinking, only resting.

Grace was the first to take alarm; for she dearly loved the young mistress, who never in any way interfered with her, and would have called her angel, but that she feared the term trenched too closely upon sacred mysteries. Her fears once awakened, she spoke to the doctor; but James Cameron was not one to betray alarm, and though he thanked her for the warning in a voice rather lower than usual, he volunteered neither question nor remark, and prescribed neither medicine nor tonic. But from that hour Lucy's every look and word underwent a scrutiny of which she was happily unconscious; for, a stranger as

she had ever been to the watchfulness of love, any particular notice would only have distressed her.

What were James Cameron's feelings when, drawing his little sister's hand through his arm in their evening stroll, he felt how very thin that hand was; or, as he watched the poor little pale face as she sang to him in the twilight hush?—who shall say? Perhaps, had he felt less, he would have said more.

At the end of a fortnight's silent secret watching, he bade Grace prepare for a trip to the sea-side: London he said was too hot and trying that summer.

Lucy would have protested but she knew from experience that her brother's word was law.

Next came the question, "Where she would go—had she a choice?" For a moment her heart beat wildly, and the long-suppressed cry, "Let me go home!" rose quivering to her lips. Solitude and a sick fancy had deepened the love of country into a passion. "Oh, for a sight of the auld home! a breath of Highland air, a lonely ride with the mists above, and the blue heather below!—was this not something to live for?"

Had James but seen the sudden brightening of the poor tired eyes, he might have guessed something of her secret; but he seldom looked at his little sister now, never when speaking to her; and even before he had repeated his question, the light had faded from her eyes, and her heart had ceased to beat. For no hope of life for herself would she run the risk of wounding dear Jamie, who, in her weak longing for the old home, might see ingratitude for the new one he had provided.

So died out of her life its last hope, its last day-dream, as with her usual gentle submission she placed the choice in her brother's hands.

And he chose, as he thought for the best, a rather dull but highly respectable and expensive sea-side village. He himself took her down, saw that she had every comfort money could procure, and would have spared her an extra day but that she urged him so repeatedly to return to his duties; and, once returned, he found a

press of work awaiting him; for sickness was rife in London that summer, and the general confidence in the Scotch doctor's skill was increasing daily. Gladly would he have escaped, but it was impossible; and Lucy gave him constant and cheering news, as did also the doctor to whose care he had entrusted her. In every letter Lucy reiterated her entreaties that he would not think of leaving those who need his presence so much more than she did, and who might not be as obedient to written instructions. At the end of the month she asked to return; but London was still hot and unhealthy, and she was ordered to remain another month, in the course of which the doctor promised to run down and judge himself of her progress.

Meanwhile he wrote regularly, but his letters were as short as they were concise—not a word more than was absolutely necessary. Once, and once only, he told her that he would be very glad to see her home, but he never told her how desolate that home was without her, how he missed her at every turn, how he shunned the silence of the great drawing-room, because of the open piano that reminded him so painfully of her, how amid the busiest and most anxious scenes her pale, spiritual face would rise before him—no, all this he did not tell her, fearing it might induce her to return to him too soon; and he hoped all from change of air and scene. But he was preparing a surprise for her, and for himself a well-earned holiday to be spent with his little sister in their Highland home, there to forget for a month at least the heat and pressure of his anxious labours; there too, together and alone, brother and sister would have time to remember they were such indeed, and would be drawn close, very close together. From these pleasant dreams, however, on the very eve of his departure, he had been awakened by an urgent message from the dull, respectable sea-side place. “Oh, Jamie dear, fetch me home—fetch me home to die.” Yes, Lucy, the overwhelming conviction that urged you to that passionate appeal was a true one—you came home to die.

Dr. Cameron's well-earned holiday was passed at his sister's death-bed. But the skill that had saved so many was powerless to save the only being he loved, and all he could do was to watch by her to the end, which he did with a calm, silent devotion as touching as it was misunderstood. Poor Lucy ascribed it to pity—generosity—never to love. And again and again she would thank him in broken, self reproachful words and with wistful, troubled eyes, and then turn her face to the wall with the heart weary cry, "How long, O Lord; true and merciful—how long!" Useless she had ever been! but how long was she to be a burden, and wear out in weary watchings that noble and devoted life!

Yes, God is merciful; and, even before the first splendour of autumn had faded from the earth, she laid her head for the last time upon the breast whose deeper, tenderer feelings she might never know, and with one small, wasted hand clasped in his, and supported by his strong, sheltering arm, she bade him quietly good-bye, told him not to grieve, for that she was glad—oh! so very glad to go; thanked him once more for his kindness, his indulgence, the home he had given her, and for his long watchings by her death-bed; and asked him, as a last favour, to take care of poor Tip, who, in her, lost his only friend, being too cross and ugly for any one else to love.

He promised; and, in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible, asked her whether there was nothing else he could do for her.

She paused; then very faintly answered, "No." How could she tell him that her last hour would be brightened by the thought that she would sleep her long sleep beneath the shadow of her native hills, within sight of the dear old kirk, and within sound of the dark loch that, stirred by autumn winds, would chant her requiem?—weak, impious longing! Did not the sunlight of God's love shine alike on Scottish kirkyard and London cemetery? Then she shuddered, and answered very faintly, "No."

As had been her life, so was her death—calm, noiseless, passionless. James felt her head sink lower and lower upon his breast, he saw the hand that encircled Tip's rough neck gently relax its hold, and he knew that he was once more alone.

Lucy was buried in Kensal Green, and above her rose a pure white monument that simply recorded her name and age, while below might be read the short inscription—

“IT IS WELL.”

Yes, it was well; for there are meek ones of the earth of whom the world is not worthy.

As the doctor always wore black, his broad crape hatband was the only outward visible sign of his mourning, and with that which is inward and invisible a stranger intermeddled not.

At first, of course, there were many only too willing to offer him consolation, beginning with rapturous praises of the dead who had always seemed too good to live, deploring her untimely fate, which, however, was not unfrequently spoken of as a happy release, and invariably winding up with the self-congratulatory assertion that they had foreseen it from the first. But very soon the rough manner in which all such condolences were repelled put an effectual stop to them; and, by an easy transition of feeling, pity turned to condemnation. “It was now quite clear that he had never cared for his poor little sister, who was far too good for him.”

So judged the world, and its fiat was hardly to be wondered at, when even Grace herself, who knew her master so well, marvelled at his calm, godly resignation, and tortured herself with bitter self-accusation because she could not reach the same elevated standard, but still mourned with many secret tears the angel who had been taken from the earth. [Grace called her angel now, without fear of impiety.]

One day, when troubled beyond measure by self-accusing doubts, she opened her heart to her master,

and asked him if it was indeed a sin to mourn for the dead. His answer, and the dark shadow that gathered over his brow, perplexed rather than reassured her.

"Tears and regrets," he said, "were sinful only in those who saw in every trial the hand of retributive justice—sorrow for sorrow, life for life. Grief such as hers was no sin."

CHAPTER IX.

DR. CAMERON sat at his blazing hearth, a table covered with books beside him, and at his feet old Tip, grown greyer, shaggier, more snarling, and less loveable than ever, his nose resting on his master's foot. Asleep he was not, for every now and then one ragged ear would twitch, perhaps with the heat of the blaze, and from time to time, while heaving a deep sigh of content, he would half open the left eye to blink dreamily at the fire, or the right that from under the thick tangled hair sought the doctor's face, as if to make quite sure of its being indeed he.

The postman's knock, sharp and sudden. Both master and dog started, and the former, awakening from his reverie, smiled down upon his one friend. "Letters for us, old fellow." Tip wagged his stump of a tail, and instead of his nose he placed his fore paws on his master's foot, and raising his rough head to his knee, looked up at him with dark, loving eyes, full of grateful acknowledgment of the implied partnership.

"Many letters to-day, Matthews?" asked the doctor, as his old confidential servant entered the room.

"Three letters, two newspapers, and twopence to pay on the little one from Scotland, that wasn't stamped at all," answered the man, in a tone as solemnly dejected, and with a face as long as if it had been the head of John the Baptist himself he bore before him on a charger.

Is there not something radically wrong about this lower world of ours, that, when men have but one life to live, they should be allowed so cruelly to mistake their vocation? Matthews, for instance, would have made his fortune as an undertaker; the very length and melancholy pallor of his face would have inspired in mourning relatives the most implicit confidence, let alone the peculiar denseness of his black coat, than which none ever was blacker. This, indeed, was a remarkable characteristic of his; for whereas other men-servants wear black coats and look uncommonly jolly in them, his made an impression of the deepest mourning—an impression enhanced, perhaps, by the fact of his always wearing a mourning pin, ornamented by a tombstone and weeping willow, designed in slate-coloured hair, and surrounded by the inscription, “In memory of——” *whom* was known only to himself—a refinement of sentiment that would have been genius in an undertaker. The little unstamped letter from Scotland was the last the doctor took up; nor had he the faintest suspicion of the truth, until having torn it open he glanced at the signature, which caused him no little surprise. The note ran thus:—

“DEAR DOCTOR CAMERON,

“You told me at the railway-station that if ever I wanted a friend I was to apply to you. I do want one very much. I am so miserable here that I am sure I shall die if I remain; and now that poor papa is gone, I have no friend to consult, no one in the world is left to me; and that is why I write to you. I heard you tell Aunt Deborah that you had not visited Scotland for five years, and that you thought of doing so in the autumn. I wish you would; for Dunweanie Farm is not very far from Edinburgh, you know, and I should be so glad to see you. I hope to receive an answer by *return of post* addressed to the Post Office; for I did not tell Aunt that I was writing: she would be sure to forbid it, as she always forbids my doing everything that

I want to do. Pray come; I shall be so disappointed if you don't.

"Yours, in great haste,

"WINIFRED MORGAN."

James Cameron, long after he had finished the fairy note, sat staring blankly at the delicate and somewhat illegible characters. He had not forgotten the poor little wayward patient who had so interested him—indeed, it was a peculiarity of his that he never forgot anybody or anything; but her letter placed him in rather an awkward position. How could he help her? A clandestine correspondence with a young lady of eighteen was out of the question, and a Quixotic trip to Scotland to relieve her dulness was equally impracticable. The poor child had strangely mistaken the importance of the promise he had made to befriend her in her hour of need—an hour when in some momentous epoch of her life she might require the help of a clear head to advise, or a strong arm to lean on; and now she claimed the friendship that, to true-hearted James Cameron, was a thing so sacred, merely as a relief from the *ennui* of a country life.

With a half-contemptuous shrug of the shoulders he threw the note upon the table; as he did so, his eye caught the words, "I shall die if I remain here." Silly, childish words the doctor would have pronounced them three years ago; men such as he, strong, brave, unflinching, nerved to endure, aye and to outlive the worst, and with an iron will, and a faith in their own destiny that would remove mountains, and compass sea and land to bear them triumphant even over the crumbling ashes of their own dead hopes, cannot be easily made to believe in those more tender, sensitive natures, that a rough blast or a succession of dark days will crush, sometimes even kill. But a bitter experience had taught him the reality of such things: one young life had thus passed away, why not another? He recalled Winifred's restless, wistful

looks and her heart-weary words; he re-read her letter, stroked his chin reflectively, and relapsed into thought.

Tip, who did not at all approve of his master's protracted fit of abstraction, pushed his nose up between his hands.

"What can we do to help her—eh, Tip?"

Though the most sagacious of quadrupeds, Tip knew little of young ladies and their requirements; he therefore very wisely refrained from giving his opinion, and Dr. Cameron, who could always think best in the open air, seized his hat, and, with Tip at his heels, set off for an evening stroll.

The next day, Grace, who had long urged upon the doctor the advisability of a few days' holiday, now that London was comparatively empty, heard with much silent gratification that he had finally resolved upon visiting Scotland. Highly she approved of the plan, little thinking how radical a change it would work both in her life and his.

It was on just such a dull autumn day as had seen him standing with Lucy by his father's grave, when heavy mists rolled darkly over mountain and loch, that the 12.30 train set him down on the platform of a small Scotch town, three miles distant from which lay Dunweanie Farm. No conveyance, of course, of any kind was to be got; but had it even been otherwise, a brisk walk over the heathery downs would have been far more to his taste.

In the lives of all of us there are certain solemn pauses—times when, withdrawn from the busy action that constitutes our life, we have leisure to look ourselves, as it were, and our position in the face.

Such a time had now come for James Cameron. His lonely walk over such familiar ground naturally awoke an unusual train of thought. The last time he had traversed those downs was as a lad—a brave, strong, resolute boy, who, keeping the one aim of his life steadily before him, had followed it faithfully and unflinchingly, in spite of every opposition. And now the goal was

reached; honour, fortune, and a long career of usefulness were his. Well might he glory in such a retrospect. His whole past lay before him; not one link, one memory, was wanting—not one!

James Cameron drew a deep breath, then stopped short, and lifting his hat from his hot brow, that the cool air might blow over it, gave vent to an impatient exclamation, and strode on at a rapid pace, as if to escape from some painful memory.

Miss Deborah was in her poultry-yard, surrounded by her large and thriving family whom she was scolding and feeding alternately, when a shrill-voiced female servant announced the arrival of a visitor, who was just then entering the gate.

“The new lawyer, of course; come to introduce himself. Show him into the drawing-room. But no, stop! is he on foot or horseback?”

“On foot, ma’am.”

“Then his boots will be dirty; show him into the parlour, and tell him I object to smoking. If his clothes smell of tobacco, open the window.”

The maid disappeared, and Miss Burns returned to her feathered favourites, who were clamouring loudly—so loudly, indeed, that she did not hear the approach of footsteps, until a voice at her ear caused her to start so violently, that she actually dropped the bag of grain. Had the intruder been any one but Jamie Cameron she would have revenged upon him her momentary loss of dignity and self-possession. As it was, however, she was too glad to see him not to give him a cordial welcome.

“And now that you are really here,” she said, as having recovered from her first surprise, she led the way to the house, “you will of course spend some days with us?”

“That must depend upon letters; but to-night, at least, if you will send to the station for my carpet-bag.”

“Ah! you’ve not forgotten the old road—eh, Jamie? nor your old love of a blow over the downs, though you

are a Londoner—the one excuse that child Winifred always offers for her lazy, useless life.”

“How is Miss Morgan?”

“Oh, well enough in health, but as full of fancies as the year is of hours. I can’t get her to walk a mile at a stretch; and all the time she’s complaining of the stones, the stiles, the mud, or the bulls—every horned head of cattle being such in her eyes. One night she declares she can’t sleep because of the barking and howling of the watch-dogs; another night she alarms the whole house, because she fancies a hornet is playing hide and seek in her curtains; when she has a headache, it is an earwig that has got into her brain; and would you believe, that only last Sunday, when our good minister was in the midst of his discourse—and a highly edifying discourse it was, proving how impossible it is for those to be saved who do not think exactly as he does—she went off into hysterics, and had to leave the kirk; and the only explanation she could give of such sacrilegious conduct was, that the pew was so high, and the sermon so long, and the preacher’s face so miserable, that she felt as if she were buried alive, and he were preaching her funeral sermon. Such horrible notions to get into a girl’s head, that I sometimes doubt whether she can indeed be my poor niece’s child. But what else could one expect from such a bringing up?—a father who was little better than a Fenian, and that wicked old papist nurse who only the other day sent her a letter with the queen’s head topsy-turvy on it—the queen’s *own royal head, with the crown on it, turned topsy-turvy*—that will show you what *she* was; a likely person, certainly, to inculcate a proper respect for the country, queen, and kirk. Well, it’s a lucky thing for the poor girl, that she’s got at last among respectable people, who set her a godly example, however little she may profit by it.”

They had now reached the drawing-room. On its threshold the doctor paused, and held out his hand. “This is really like old times,” he said, with a smile half sad, half playful. “I can almost fancy myself the

school-boy once more, and feel something like awe on entering the sacred precincts which I never ventured to penetrate without especial permission."

Miss Deborah's hard face softened considerably as she returned the friendly pressure and the friendly smile. "Well, well, I'm glad there's something of the school-boy still left in you, though you have grown so grey and look so important, and have such an ugly stoop in your shoulders that you look at least ten years older than your father did a year before his death. He was a fine-looking fellow, to be sure." James Cameron had been Miss Deborah's first and last love.

"Never mind the stoop, or the grey hairs either, old friend; only those who, in losing their youth, lose all, need fear to grow old; whilst those who have chained old Father Time to their oar, have converted him from a tyrant to a slave, and may cease to fear him."

"Yes, yes, I remember you were always fond of speaking in parables; but it's little I understand of such things. All I know is, that you're not half such a fine-looking man as your father, and I don't see why you can't hold yourself upright. I suppose it comes from your always stooping over sick-beds. Well, well, you're changed from what you were, and no mistake about that; but I'm glad, at least, that there's something of the boy still left in you—enough, I hope, to give you an appetite after your long walk. We've a famous ham in cut, and a round of beef, and the best pickled salmon you've eaten for the last ten years, to say nothing of such a glass of ale as you have not drunk since your last visit to Dunweanie Farm."

"Its excellence I accept upon your simple testimony; but it may not sparkle for me—I only drink water."

"Oot man! what fresh nonsense is this? Why, you drained your tumbler with the best of us, when no higher than this table."

"When no higher than the table, I was, fortunately, not accountable for my actions as a rational being,"

was the half-laughing answer. "I only drink water, on principle."

That was all James Cameron said. He was a man of action, not of words; he did not say that it was one of the many sacrifices he brought to his profession—that seeing how awful and wide-spreading a scourge intemperance had become—the very plague-spot of Great Britain that she carries with her wherever she goes, blasting with its foul breath the heathen nations she professes to convert, holding out to them salvation in the one hand and death in the other—he had devoted himself to the eradication of the evil wherever he met with it, beginning first of all with example.

Miss Deborah bethinking herself of a glass of strong tea as the best substitute for a glass of strong ale, she went off to make it, leaving the doctor alone.

For awhile he stood where she had left him, letting his eye wander slowly round the room once so familiar to him. Nothing in it had changed, any more than in its owner: there were the four small latticed windows, curtainless as of yore; for all drapery was only in Miss Deborah's eyes a receptacle for dust and vermin; and between the six windows stood the six chairs, ranged at equal distances against the wall; there was the stiff, old-fashioned chimney-piece, and its steel fender and fire-irons, bright with so fair a polish that the visitor's mind could not grasp the possibility of their ever being used; and above it, still vivid and benignant as James Cameron had seen them in his childhood, hung side by side the portraits of Miss Deborah's parents, bearing so strong a resemblance to each other that you were glad of the monstrous shirt-front, to distinguish the gentleman from the lady; and there, still keeping its original position in the centre of the room, was the large round table, with its cloth, the work of Miss Deborah's younger days, still gaudy, though somewhat faded, and all the more conspicuous from nothing being placed upon it; for, as, Miss Deborah said, "Where's the use of having a handsome cloth, if you cover it with books and card baskets, and

such like rubbish, that only litter and collect dust? One other article of furniture there was—an awkward-looking cottage piano; for though Miss Deborah herself was far, very far, from musical, her parents had bequeathed to her a piano, and all such bequests were sacred in the daughter's eyes. The key, however, had long been lost.

The doctor walked slowly to the window. All was unchanged, without as within; his eye rested on the same sombre evergreens that had always struck him as so drear and ghost-like when tapping mysteriously at the windows, or grating slowly along them, or casting strange shadows on the bare wall in the white moonlight. From thoughts of his own childhood his mind passed on to the poor little orphan, herself scarce more than a child, whose home was here. There was evidently little sympathy between aunt and niece. He would see her alone, and make her open her heart to him. How surprised she would be to hear of his sudden arrival!

Thus far had his meditations carried him when a light step was heard in the passage outside; it was certainly not that of Miss Deborah or her hand-maidens; it paused at the door; the handle turned. James Cameron and Winifred Morgan met once more.

Their meeting was a very quiet one—so quiet that the doctor was disappointed. He had expected an outburst of childish surprise and delight, but there was none. With difficulty she disengaged her hand from the folds of a thick plaid that was wrapped about her, and laid it quietly in his. She did not welcome him by so much as a word, evidently expecting him to speak first, which he did.

"I have to thank you for your letter, Miss Morgan, which would, I thought, be best answered in person."

"I feared it had been lost, as you did not answer it. Every day I went to the Post Office, and I can't tell you how disappointed I was."

"I felt sure that your aunt would not approve of a correspondence of which she knew nothing."

"Where you angry with me, then?" asked Winifred, half frightened at the gravity of his tone.

"Angry! oh no."

"I was so miserable—so very miserable," she added deprecatingly, "that I couldn't help writing. I thought that perhaps you could help me."

He did not respond to her appeal, and his next words were a command.

"Take off your hat, that I may look at you."

She did so, letting it fall at her feet, and stood before him with downcast eyes, the heavy lash throwing a dark shadow on the colourless cheek. She was certainly thinner and, if anything, paler than when he saw her last; and there were dark circles under her eyes, and about her lips a tremulous motion that told of mental restlessness. From under his bent brows the doctor watched her narrowly; but whatever his opinion was, he kept it to himself, and only remarked that he feared he had put a stop to a walk.

"Oh, no!" she answered quickly, "I am glad to stay at home; I can't bear going out; it is always so cold and damp here."

"In this room, at least, it is both; but I know where a bright fire is always to be found." So saying he left the room, followed by Winifred, who kept very close to him, as if putting herself under his protection. Before entering the parlour, through the half-open door of which burst the welcome blaze of firelight, she laid her hand timidly upon his arm.

"You will not leave to-day, will you?" The tone was very imploring, and he was glad to be able to reassure her.

Miss Deborah, who was in the act of unbottling pickles, the finishing touch to the impromptu meal that the doctor found to comprise many extra dainties that afterthought had added, gave the gentleman a friendly nod, then turned sharply round upon the young lady at his side.

"So you again forgot to feed the poultry to-day?"

"Yes, aunt."

"Yes, and you're not ashamed to own it! The poor things might die of hunger for aught you'd care; but fortunately I look after things myself, and when I went into the yard, and they all came fluttering and clamouring around me, I pretty soon guessed the truth."

"Well, of course, aunt, you've fed poultry all your life, so you couldn't forget it; but I never fed poultry in London, and I always told you I should forget, and you would insist upon my undertaking it."

"A mighty undertaking, certainly! and one you'd be glad enough to be relieved of, I dare say."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind it half so much, if it were not for the great turkey cock who eats up everything, and screams and flaps his wings, and looks at me with his fierce red eyes till he quite frightens me."

"Frightens you!—a harmless bird frightens you!" Miss Deborah laughed scornfully, and looked at the doctor as if to ask him what he thought of *that*.

"Yes, of course he does. I've heard of turkey-cocks taking strong dislikes to people, and I'm sure yours has a strong dislike to me. I so often dream of him at night, and see him at the foot of my bed, screeching and flapping his wings at me."

"Don't talk such nonsense, child—it's dreadful to hear you. And what, pray, prevented your taking the sugar and tea I gave you yesterday, and which still lie on the sideboard, to old Peggy Macrae? *She* doesn't scream or flap her wings, poor old body, because she's got none—though I wish I were as sure of them as she is, in the Lord's good time."

"Yes, of course, she's very good, and quite sure of heaven—such very ugly people always are. But it's so dreadful to go and see her; for she *will* take my hand and show me her bad leg, and she's always talking of visions she has, and at night I can't sleep for thinking of her, and when I shut my eyes I see her sitting in the arm-chair by the window, staring and making faces at me, and——"

"For shame, Winifred!" broke in Miss Deborah, aghast with horror and indignation. "How dare you speak in that way of God's elect, and call down the anger of the Lord, who is a consuming fire and the avenger of his saints!"

"But it's not my fault, aunt; if such thoughts get into my head, I can't help it." This was said so humbly and dejectedly, that the strong man's sympathy was enlisted on the side of the little culprit, and he was half inclined to quarrel with his old friend for her harsh though well-merited censure. To change the conversation he asked Winifred to allow him to relieve her of her heavy plaid, "For," he added in a tone of real interest, "you must be careful of yourself; you do not look strong, and our Scotch air is rather trying."

She stood before him like a submissive child, whilst he unfastened and took it off; but she did not thank him, and drawing an arm-chair close up to the fire she sank down into it, setting her small feet on the fender, and turning her back unceremoniously to both aunt and doctor, the latter, of whom during the next half-hour proved the fallacy of the precept that affirms that you cannot do two things at once, by listening to and answering Miss Deborah, doing full justice to her hospitality, and furtively watching the little figure in the arm-chair.

A conversation he had with the aunt in the course of the afternoon showed Winifred's position to be worse even than he had supposed. Her father, who had passed for a wealthy man, was in fact little better than an adventurer, possessed, like too many of his countrymen, of neither fortune nor principle, but trusting entirely to his wits and proverbial good luck, which together had placed him high on the list of fortunate speculators. Whatever he touched turned, as he had himself said, to gold. His credit rose, his name was all-powerful in the mercantile world, and his little daughter was everywhere looked upon as a "catch."

Well were it for the speculator, as for the man of letters, the man of science, the man of pleasure, if he

knew where to stop; the longest lane has its turning, so has the longest run of good luck. It was so with the Irishman: a great result called for a great risk; the risk was run, and the result we know! As he stood on the crowded pavement outside the city office that bright May day, he knew himself to be a ruined man, and the spoilt child, in whom had centred such brilliant hopes, a beggar.

The little saved from the general wreck barely sufficed to save his name from dishonour, and the reputed heiress was thrown upon the charity of her mother's aunt, who regarded her solely as an object of charity, deeming it an act of no small merit to burden herself, at her time of life, with a useless, fanciful girl, whose wild, irregular ways were intolerable to one so orderly and methodical. Then, too, she had strong doubts as to her niece's religious principles, suspecting her of papistical tendencies, which to her meant idolatry, and any latent germs of which she sought to eradicate, by repeated and virulent attacks upon all sects and churches, except the pure Calvinistic faith of her fathers.

That very evening at family prayers, which were conducted with much singing of psalms and a long extemporary prayer, she inveighed darkly against "that idolatrous church whose worship was a monstrous imposition and a disgrace to the whole Christian world," and put up a separate petition that if any child of "that great whore" were then among them, a wolf in sheep's clothing, fostering, though secretly, her abominations, the Lord would convert her from the error of her ways, and so save her poor soul from everlasting perdition.

Dr. Cameron, though a rigid Presbyterian, was both shocked and disgusted at these gross insinuations, and once, involuntarily, he glanced at the object of them; but Winifred was either asleep or lost in a reverie, and he felt something very like relief. After prayers, with the same listless indifference that had characterised her during the day, she lit her bedroom candle and bade her aunt good night; but her small, white face brightened

just a little as she held out her hand to the doctor. He retained it gently in his, as bending on her one of his rare beautiful smiles, he said—

“As letters may call me back to London early to-morrow, I must ask you to give me an interview before breakfast, either in the garden or drawing-room. Can you join me at half-past seven?”

“Half-past seven!” sneered Miss Deborah; “and you really expect such a very fashionable young lady as my niece to have completed her toilet at half-past seven?”

“I should be sorry to exact too much from Miss Morgan,” began the doctor; but Winifred interrupted him eagerly.

“At half-past seven I will be in the garden—I will indeed!”

“I wonder what he can have to say to her!” thought Miss Burns, as she went her nightly round of inspection, “No doubt he intends lecturing her upon her wicked conduct at church. I only hope he will make her duly sensible of all she owes me, and the kind Providence who brought her here.”

That night—a very unusual thing for him—James Cameron could not sleep, could not shut out the one haunting thought, the one haunting face, the thought and face of Winifred Morgan. Slowly, and with a prolonged whirr, the kitchen clock below struck the hours—eleven—twelve—one. Only one! how long the wakeful hours had seemed. At last, just as his ideas began to grow confused, one of the watch-dogs set up a howl, and howled so dismally and perseveringly that, fearing for that other light sleeper, he hurriedly dressed himself and went down into the yard to quiet it.

The night was a glorious one, with its countless myriads of stars above, and its solemn hush around. The cool air fell about him like a spell, calming his hot, restless brain. He passed on from the yard into the garden—he could not sleep, he would therefore watch the night out there; and so the grey, early dawn found him still pacing thoughtfully to and fro, his hands crossed behind

him, his heavy brows drawn darkly over his eyes. Much anxious thought was going on within. All that night he had been asking counsel of his own soul; and the sun, rising coldly over the distant hills, found him resolved—resolved to befriend the orphan, and watch over and protect her, taking her young life into his strong hand, in memory of the past!

CHAPTER X.

DR. CAMERON was too well accustomed to midnight watchings for the sleeplessness of the past night to derange either his health or habits; a cold bath and tumbler of water were now, as ever, his substitute for sleep, and punctually at the appointed hour he kept his rendezvous in the garden. But Winifred was before him, and her first words proved her to have been awaiting him some time. "Oh, I'm so glad you have come! I feared you had overslept yourself. It's very late, isn't it?"

He showed her his watch, half-past seven on the stroke.

"Then my watch is wrong," she said "it never went wrong in London. But it's just like everything else. I awoke so early, and couldn't get to sleep again for thinking of what you had to say to me. Is it *very* important?"

He did not answer her, but continued to walk slowly down the gravel path, until they were quite out of sight of the house and curious eyes, then he stopped abruptly. "It is of yourself and your future I wish to speak to you; but, before doing so, I must ask you to be perfectly frank, to hide nothing from me, but to open your heart freely and fearlessly as you would to your own father. Can you promise me this?"

She gave him a half-frightened look. "Please not to ask me anything about poor papa and his unfortunate

speculation. I never could understand it; but Aunt Deborah does, and she will tell you all about it."

"She has told me all." He paused, at a loss how to begin, then asked with abrupt earnestness, "Are you happy and contented here?"

"Happy! happy *here*, with Aunt Deborah!" She looked up into his face as if to make sure that she had indeed heard the word coupled with Dunweanie Farm, then added simply, "If I had been happy, I should not have written to you"—an unanswerable though not very flattering argument.

"And have you thought of any way in which I can serve you?"

"Oh no; only you said that if ever I wanted a friend I was to apply to you, and so I thought you could help me."

Dr. Cameron at that moment felt his position to be anything but an enviable one. It was his duty, while setting plainly before the orphan girl the utter forlornness of her position, to preach entire submission to her aunt, with the due recognition of all her favours; for thus only, he well knew, could there be peace between them, or a life of independence and work. To the strong and brave there needs but the helping hand to start them fairly on the journey of life, and God knows how many have done well and nobly without even that; but Dr. Cameron saw plainly enough that the friendless little creature before him was not such an one as this, and her utter helplessness it was, and childish trust in him, that awoke his tenderest pity. Something he must do, but what? This perplexing question he was still debating in his mind, when startled by the sudden and strange question, "Do you believe in fate, Dr. Cameron? Are you a fatalist?"

"I a fatalist! God forbid."

"I am, and so was poor papa." The girl said this musingly, as if thinking aloud rather than speaking, and her eyes wandered away, far away, until they seemed lost in vacancy. "He always told me that he would

never outlive ruin or disgrace—that, when life became a burden, the sooner you got rid of it the better; for that though fate might rob you of it, it could never force you to bear it against your will—your hand at least had power to keep, or lay it down, as you chose.”

Strange tenets! doubly strange when uttered by those pretty rosy lips and in that soft childish voice! The doctor was inexpressibly shocked, but how could he attack the memory of a dead father? He only therefore remarked, in his grave, half-mocking tone, “Then your idea of a fatalist is a moral coward, who rushes into eternity at the first storm that threatens his happiness or reputation?”

“I don’t understand.”

“No, my child, nor do any of those who use the word so freely. They are compelled to recognise the existence of an all-pervading influence at work in their lives, that they can neither understand nor resist, but which overrules their most cherished plans, upsets by one sweeping blow the nice combinations and calculations of years, and in their blind unbelief they call it fate! I own the same power, but I call it—God.”

“But I always think of fate as something cruel and terrible—a doom that pursues certain families from generation to generation, until the last is cut off; and I have often thought that such a fate pursues us. There was poor mamma, you know, who died when I was born, only just one year after her marriage, when she was still so young and happy. Nurse says she suffered so much, and when she heard she had a little baby she smiled, and stretched out her arms to embrace me; but death came between us, and wouldn’t even let her give me one kiss. And then poor papa, who was so rich, and strong, and clever, was cut off so suddenly, and by such a dreadful death; and aunt told me that if I didn’t sell all my jewels his name would be dishonoured, and so of course I did; and now I am all alone, the last of the family on his side; and when the winter comes, and the cold snow and frost, I shall die too, and they will

bury me in the square brick grave with Aunt Deborah's father and mother. There is room, she says, for two more, and they'll keep it free from weeds, and plant fresh rosemary on it, not because I lie there, but because of Aunt Deborah's parents; and years hence her coffin will be brought there too, and then the grave will be quite full, and they will close it up for ever. Or perhaps as aunt thinks me so wicked, she would not let me lie with her and her parents, but would give me a little grave all to myself; but they would not gather the weeds or plant rosemary over that, because I should lie there alone."

Well might Miss Burns talk of horrible notions getting into the child's head. But how had they got there? Were they indeed mere sickly fancies, or had her new life, its dulness, its restraints, begun to tell upon a mind, that never perhaps very strong, had hardly yet recovered from that first terrible shock? One thing at least was now clear to the doctor, the expediency of removing her as soon as possible from Dunweanie Farm; such unhealthy fantasies, if long indulged in, could only end in insanity or an early grave. Fearful of repelling in any way the confidence he had sought, he spoke gently and soothingly. "I fear," he said, "that my native air has a depressing influence upon your spirits; if so, you must not remain here. I will speak to your aunt, and——" He stopped short, astonished at the effect of his words. Winifred had seized his hand, and eager, breathless, was looking up at him with eyes full of a new glad light, while the rich colour flooded her face with almost dazzling brightness. "I knew you would help me," she exclaimed excitedly; "I knew you would. Why did you not say it at once? And will you take me back to London with you—to-day—to-morrow?"

"But have you considered, my child, that London can never again be to you what it has been?"

"Why not?"

The doctor was surprised to find how little she realised her altered position. "And yet, young as she

is," he thought, "younger in mind and experience than even in years, a life of hard duty lies before her, and alone she must face and endure it. Not the first, alas! and not the last. The weakest have too often to bear the heaviest burdens; how—is known only to the God who lays it on them."

They had now reached a seat under the shadow of a wide-spreading chestnut tree. He sat down, and stooping forward deep in thought, began absently tracing letters on the gravel with the stick that was as inseparable a part of himself as the old-fashioned silver watch which he continued to wear, because it had never played him false, though gold repeaters of every shape and size, the gifts of grateful patients, lay forgotten in his drawer.

"Why not?" repeated Winifred, with an impatient pouting of the lips.

"Because your father was rich, and you are not, and the life of the rich cannot be the life of the poor; each has its pleasures and its trials, but they are very different. You have known the ease and luxury of the one; will you find it very hard to bear some of the privations of the other?"

She did not answer, but she looked puzzled, and her countenance fell. He noticed the change, and strong in his own strength, and with that great pity throbbing at his heart, he thought how easy it would be for him to add the light burden of her young life to his, and carry it for her on his own broad shoulders; but, weak or strong, each must go his own way, and live his own life, and God over all.

"Have you never thought," he asked kindly, "of your future—of what you would wish it to be?"

"No, never."

"For those situated as you are, there is but the choice between dependence and independence, and many a young girl as delicately nurtured as yourself has tried the latter, and found in it peace and even happiness. I have many influential friends who will exert themselves on your behalf, if you will let me act for you. I will

consult your interest in every way, as I should that of my own sister."

She had caught the meaning of his words sooner even than he supposed; for Miss Deborah had not failed to set before her in no very bright colours the life from which her charity had saved her—the life of a governess. "And must I go out as a governess?" she asked, as all the brightness and animation faded out of her face.

"Oh, I'd rather stay with Aunt Deborah—indeed I would! I'm so dreadfully afraid of girls. Papa once sent me to school, because the governess I had would insist upon making love to him, and wanted him to marry her, and he didn't like it; but the girls teased me so that I cried all day for a week, and papa fetched me home, and since then whenever I saw a school in the park I always crossed over so as not to meet it."

"Would you be happier as companion?"

"But it's only old ladies who want young companions, and I don't like old ladies; they're so tiresome with their long stories of how different everything was when they were young; and they have always pet dogs, and read Walter Scott, and would expect me to get up at night when they're ill—and they always *are* ill at night—and to catch up the stitches they drop in their knitting: and I know nothing about knitting; nurse tried to teach me, but I never could learn."

"The portrait you have drawn of old ladies is hardly a fair one; I know many who are as young as the youngest in everything but years, and who would be to you as a mother."

"Oh yes, I had an old aunt, papa's aunt, who lived with us two years before she died, and always said she was a mother to me. I *couldn't* be a companion; it would be worse even than living with Aunt Deborah."

"How then *can* I help you?" asked the doctor, sorely perplexed.

Not the least change of colour, not the lightest tremor of the voice or flutter of the little hand she laid upon

his arm, betrayed either hesitation and confusion as she answered promptly, "I thought that perhaps as you have a large house, and are rich, and are so good and kind to all, as aunt says, you might take me to live with you. I am sure I should not be in your way; for I could live with you just as I did with poor papa, and I was never in his way." She paused, then added in a deeper, softer tone, or so at least it sounded to the doctor's ear, "Had you not once a sister?—a sister Lucy, who lived with you? Aunt has often told me of her. I think she said she was just my age when she last saw her."

Was it an angel or a demon who whispered to you those words, bright-haired, ill-fated Winifred? No matter; they served your purpose, though uttered in all unconsciousness of their power. Once more the strange connection between the dead and the living was forced upon James Cameron's mind; once more the gentle sister, who never pleaded for herself, seemed to plead for the helpless girl he had sworn to himself to protect. And with this thought came another, sharp, sudden, rejected at first as preposterous, but gradually forming itself into a resolve as clear and unalterable as if he had been working it out in his mind for days.

One way there was, and only one, of helping the poor child effectually, and strange to say it had never occurred to him, and never would have occurred to him, but for her childish, inconsiderate words. Meanwhile Winifred, whose one aim was to get away from Scotland and back to London, listened in breathless suspense for the words that were to seal her fate, little thinking how irrevocably they would seal it.

"I fear you are hardly aware, Miss Morgan, of the importance of the request you have made. There is but one way in which I could take you to my home. Can you not guess that way?"

No, the innocent inquiring eyes, upturned to his, were sufficient answer.

"By making you its mistress, and my wife."

She understood him now, for her eyelids drooped, a

faint blush tinged her cheek, and she withdrew her hand from his arm, folding it over the other in her lap.

Had he frightened her? Was she shocked or pained, or was she merely acting as all young ladies act on such occasions? Of all mundane affairs, affairs of the heart, as they are called, were those in which James Cameron had least experience, and he hardly knew what to make of her silence. Evidently his last proposition had met with as little favour as the two that had preceded it. This thought was a wonderful relief to his mind. Still his position was a rather embarrassing one.

"I fear I have startled you," he said at last.

She answered his question by another—

"Do you really wish to marry me?"

"I wish to give you a right to my protection and my home. Do you fear entrusting to me your future?"

"Oh no, it isn't that—only——I never thought—I never guessed you were in love with me."

"In love." That was an altogether new light; and the doctor felt almost guilty of a personal slight to his poor little *protégée*, who however went on, after a moment's pause, without waiting for a reply—

"I always thought that an offer, a real personal offer I mean—for of course papa had several offers for me when I was thought to be rich—would be such a different thing. It all seems so strange——"

"And unnatural," added the doctor coldly, almost sternly. "It was but an alternative I offered you, like the rest, and one which you very wisely reject. Let us drop the subject. On my return to London I will speak to an old friend of mine, and interest her in your behalf. She will, I am sure, befriend you, perhaps even receive you into her house. She has no child, and will, I know, for my sake look upon you as such; till then——"

"You will leave me with Aunt Deborah, and the cold winds will set in, and I shall die; and just now I thought you would take me to London with you, and marry me, and be kind to me as poor papa was—and—and——"

Here she broke down altogether; and James Cameron, shocked, dismayed, awoke to the terrible fact that Miss Morgan was crying—yes, positively crying, the great tears first filling her eyes, then rolling in a bright shower down her cheeks, and finally trickling through the small white fingers with which she covered her face. This was more than the doctor, with all his stoical philosophy, could bear, and his utmost eloquence was exerted to soothe and console her. How he effected this, he himself hardly knew; but of course he repeated his offer and this time with far more of tenderness; for it is well said that pity is akin to love, and will often borrow its semblance and adopt its very words and looks. By such words and looks did he comfort Winifred, who, nestling close up to his side, slipped into his the little hand still wet with recent tears, and in a pretty childish way made him settle everything on the spot; and he yielded, rather than run the risk of another outbreak of grief. He was to return to town the following day, to make suitable arrangements for her reception, and prepare his old housekeeper for a new mistress; and as soon as he could run away for a day or two, he would come back to claim her.

This was the conclusion they had just come to, when Miss Deborah's shrill voice was heard calling alternately, "James! Winifred!" The latter started up in nervous agitation. "Oh, aunt is calling us! and she will be so angry at our keeping breakfast waiting. But it doesn't matter now. Oh, I am so happy—so happy! I don't think I shall ever mind again, now that everything is settled. Everything? No! they had fixed nothing about the wedding trip. Where should it be? How stupid of them to forget it."

Poor James Cameron! This suggestion was a cruel blow to him. He had simply proposed to himself marrying her quietly in the little Scotch kirk, so as to give her a right in the eyes of the world to his protection and home, and then taking her at once to London, and installing her at No. — Russell Square, under the

careful guardianship of Grace Ingles. And now she talked of a trip, confidently and boldly, as though only claiming a right. Well, well, the little orphan must shed no more tears; and after all, it was no such unprecedented demand. Young ladies did as a rule have honeymoons and wedding trips, he believed; only, he never dreamt of being himself mixed up in such things. What did she say to a week at Brighton?—a fine bracing air, very good for the spirits; or a tour in Scotland or Wales? or a trip to the wild coast of Cornwall? or——”

But she interrupted him unceremoniously, and decided at once and definitely for Paris.

Here was another blow to the doctor's feelings and prejudices. Of all places in the world Paris was the one least likely to suit him. Into its gaieties his stern religious principles forbade his entering; and what is Paris without? As she seemed bent upon the Continent, he proposed their visiting the interesting old towns of Belgium, the Italian ruins, Venice and the Tyrol, or Norway and Sweden. But she pouted, shook her head, declared she hated old towns and ruins and mountains, and should die of the cold in Norway; and wound up by lifting to his the wistful eyes he could never resist, and pleading hard for Paris. And so at last it was settled.

On entering the parlour, they found tea and Miss Deborah awaiting them. At any other time Winifred would have received a sharp reproof for her unpunctuality; but the wise aunt, hoping the doctor had made good use of his time in lecturing the young lady upon the duties she owed to God and her benefactress, checked for once the angry taunt, and turned her eyes inquiringly from one to the other to guess if possible how matters stood. Upon this point she was not long left in doubt, for Winifred, after returning her stiff good morning, burst out with childish impetuosity, “Oh, aunt! what do you think! Isn't it nice? Dr. Cameron is going to take me

away from here—first to Paris and then to London to live with him.”

“Live with him! For shame, Winifred! What new nonsense is this?”

The doctor here felt himself called upon to explain, which he did as briefly as possible; and Miss Deborah sat staring blankly at him, wondering what the world was coming to when a man like James Cameron could talk such rubbish. Had she just heard that the angel Gabriel, seeking a wife among the daughters of the earth, had fixed his choice on Winifred Morgan, she could hardly have been more utterly confounded. But to betray either surprise or curiosity was a feminine weakness of which her strong mind was incapable; she therefore presided at the breakfast-table in dignified silence, after having effectually put a stop to all attempt at conversation on the part of Winifred, who seemed inclined to be communicative, by telling her that it was highly improper in any young person to usurp the conversation, and bring herself and her concerns forward when in the company of her elders.

Winifred at once shrank back into herself, and as soon as breakfast was over slipped quietly out of the room.

No sooner had the door closed upon her, than Miss Deborah rose, and striding up to the doctor, laid her two hands firmly down upon his shoulders, and looked him searchingly in the face—

“James Cameron, what folly, what madness, is this? What have you been about?”

“My dear friend, you know as well as I do. I proposed to your niece, and was accepted.”

“A pretty morning’s work I must say, and one that does you infinite credit.”

“I hope so.”

“Hope so, indeed! I’ll tell you what it is, James, you’ve committed as deliberate an act of folly as ever sent a lunatic to Bedlam. What in the name of fortune could have made you take so sudden and fatal a step?

If even you were in love with the child I'd say nothing—as well reason with a mad dog as with a love-sick fool; but you're no more in love with her than I am."

"My dear Miss Deborah," answered the doctor very gravely, "were I to explain to you my motives for acting as I have done, you would not understand them, any more than you would believe me were I to tell you that the hardy, rude country life, that to you seems elysium, would soon kill the poor little town-bred niece."

"Ah! I see, and to save her from an early grave you marry her, and sacrifice to her your life? And in return you'll get neither love nor gratitude; for of the one she's incapable, and you could never teach her even the meaning of the other, because she hasn't the *heart* to understand it. Not the heart! do you hear me, James Cameron? The dog that fawns at your feet, and licks the hand that feeds him, has more heart and feeling in one loving glance than the soft, pretty, tender creature you have chosen for your wife. Aye, you may knit your brows. Tut, man! what's your frown but mere child's play compared with that of your father, and I braved that and his fierce words and looks for your sake, and told him I would never again enter the doors from which his own son had been turned out—and I never did. Yet he bore me no ill will, poor fellow, but often sent Lucy to me; and a year before his death, when I was very ill, he came himself, and so we made it up, and shook hands—it was the last time I saw him."

At the first words recalling past scenes of bitter strife and variance the doctor winced, and a dark flush overspread his face. But good, blundering Miss Deborah, accustomed to set her foot firmly down upon hard bare facts, could not tread lightly over the hallowed ground of memory—the burial-place of the heart. If she noticed any change of countenance, she ascribed it to annoyance at what she had said of Winifred, and, relying on the purity of her motives to gain a hearing, she proceeded with ruthless disregard of his feelings.

"You flatter yourself, perhaps, that she's a young untutored thing, who could be moulded to anything by a little careful management; but I tell you she will never be softened into anything *better*, though you may harden her into something *worse*. Hers is a very strange character, and one with which you will never have any real sympathy. Thank God, you may yet be warned in time. For her or her feelings you need have no fear: any home in London would suit her as well, or even better than yours, and I will find the means; for it shall never be said of Deborah Burns that she refused help to her own kith and kin. The Lord knows I would do much to see the child comfortably settled, but I cannot and will not allow you to sacrifice to her your useful, honourable life."

"A life once dishonoured ceases to be honourable." The doctor's face had been gradually hardening into the set look of fixed determination, that all who knew anything of the Cameron family would recognise as a distinctive characteristic of theirs. Miss Deborah had too often seen it in the father not to know its import, and that the son's resolution was unalterable even before he added in a cold dry tone,—

"In all manly sincerity I proposed to your niece and was accepted; my life therefore belongs to her, and with it any sacrifice my solemn promise to love and cherish her may entail; and were I to betray the confidence of a young unprotected girl, wounding her in the finer instincts of her womanhood, and forsaking her through a cowardly fear for my own domestic peace and happiness, life for me would be over: a man's best life is his honour, for that belongs to others and survives him, while his happiness, being a mere personal matter, dies with him."

"Well, I have had my say, that's a comfort at least. God grant you may never have cause to repent of your decision."

"Amen. I accept the responsibility; and if I have any fear, it is for *her*, not myself. Could I but have

found some other way of helping her effectually, I should not have asked her to link her bright young life to mine; but, as you say, hers is a strange nature. Poor child, I hope she may never regret the trust she has reposed in me. God is my witness, I will do my utmost to make her happy, and will deal gently and tenderly by her, and bear with her throughout, whatever her shortcomings may be, in memory of the past and the irreparable injury the innocent and helpless once suffered at my hands."

The last words, spoken in an undertone rather to himself than his auditor, puzzled the good Scotch lady not a little; but, after a moment's thoughtful pause, he added in a lighter tone and with a softening look, "This then being settled, there remains for me but to commend my child-wife to your kind care till I return to claim her. You will watch over her, will you not? and for my sake bear with her thoughtless, inconsiderate ways, remembering that she is already the dearest part of myself, and that whatever affects her, affects my manhood and my honour."

Miss Deborah, half touched, but wholly unconvinced, gave the desired promise, only adding as a parting hit the good old proverb, that assures us that as we make our bed so we shall lie on it. Then, the doctor having ridden off to a neighbouring town where he had business to transact, she summoned Winifred to her presence, and, mindful of the promise she had made to befriend James Cameron's child-wife, she first treated her to a long and most emphatic lecture upon the duty she now owed to society and her future husband as a responsible being, and by way of exemplifying that duty carried her off to the kitchen, there to watch the interesting and instructive process of apple-jelly making. And Winifred, though pouting and half inclined to cry, submitted, as she always did, to her aunt's stronger will, and looked, and tried to understand, and felt thoroughly miserable. Never had a day appeared to her so interminably long; never did love-lorn maiden await the return of truant knight

with more ardent impatience than did she that of the lover in whom centred her every hope of escape. At last towards evening she caught the distant clatter of his horse's hoofs, and, regardless of cold and gathering mists, ran out to the gate to welcome him, and place herself under his protection.

He said little, but he was both touched and pleased at this first proof of awakening tenderness, and dismounting at once he held the reins in one hand and gave her the other, and so they returned to the house. The doctor then led his horse to the stables, after asking Winifred, as he was cold and stiff with his long ride, to take a turn with him; "only she must first go and fetch her shawl and bonnet."

She assented eagerly, flying up and down stairs and joining him, all flushed and breathless, before he had even reached the stable-door.

"Oh! never mind the horse," she exclaimed; "Tims will look after him. I'm so afraid of aunt calling me. Oh! I'm so glad you're come; you can't think how tired I am of apple jelly!"

"Apple jelly!" echoed the doctor, absently; "apple jelly!"

"Yes; aunt says that, as I'm so soon to be married, I should know something of house-keeping; and so, while I stay here, she will teach me all my duties, and how to look after my house, and to-day she showed me how to make apple jelly; but the kitchen was so hot, and smelt so of apples, that I felt quite faint, and I scalded my fingers and burnt the apples, and I'm sure I could never make it all by myself, it seems so dreadfully difficult. Do you care for apple jelly?"

The question was accompanied by an appealing look, that said plainly enough, "Please to say no!"

"Apple jelly! Did you say apple jelly, my dear? I never eat such things."

The doctor had heard but little of what she said, and, answering at random, was relieved to find, by her brightening look, that he had hit on the right thing.

"Oh! I am so glad; but, then, there are many other things aunt says I must learn before I am fit to be your wife,—how to cook a mutton-chop, and sew on shirt buttons, and cast up accounts; and that, in case of your being ill, I should be competent to nurse you myself, and make gruel and arrowroot, and poultices, and baby socks."

"Baby socks! And in what way does Miss Deborah think that they would conduce to my recovery?"

"Oh, no! I don't think they had anything to do with *you*; only aunt says I should know how to make them. She kept her father supplied with socks of her own making to the day of his death—so she told me. Oh dear! I wish I was already married; it will all seem so hard and difficult." And she wound up with so despairing a sigh that the doctor's sympathy was enlisted, and he hastened to reassure her, promising her perfect freedom from all household cares, as he had an old and valued servant who had managed his house for years.

"Are you satisfied now, little one?" he added, pausing a moment in his rapid walk to smile down upon her, and look into her face with searching tenderness, "or is there anything else that wants setting to rights before I leave?"

"Oh, no!" She assured him there was nothing else, if only he would say all this to Aunt Deborah; and her mind being quite at rest upon that point, she fluttered off to another subject, her companion listening or not, as he pleased.

Perhaps, if James Cameron had had more experience of women, he might have weighed all that light talk in the balance and found it wanting—wanting in the one essential Miss Deborah had denied to her altogether—heart. As it was, he listened to her in silence, half puzzled, half amused. Confident in his own power to think and act for himself and others, he certainly expected nothing from the weak hand of a woman. His it was to give, hers to receive; and all he asked in return was her confidence, a confidence as full and entire

as one heart can give another; and this he besought of her in all earnestness and humility as they walked together under the great trees of the avenue, the dead leaves falling thickly around them on that grey autumn evening.

He spoke solemnly, and with a certain ring of sadness in his voice. "Would to God I could have committed you into the hands of one whose life was less shadowed than mine, and who would be equally ready to cherish and protect you; but true disinterested love is rare, and you might have dragged through a weary, desolate life without finding it. In what I have done I have acted for the best. God grant the future may not prove me mistaken! The world would, no doubt, call ours a strangely assorted marriage, and augur ill for our domestic happiness. For myself I have no fear; but for you,—so young, so inexperienced,—have you sufficiently reflected upon the importance of the step you are about to take? Have you no doubts, no hesitation? for there is yet time to retract. Your aunt said something of another home in London suiting you better than mine. It may be so. Tell me, do you think you would be happier among young people of your own age? I could find you such a home, and for the means you would be dependent upon no one; having once claimed you, I could never give you up. You would be to me as a sister—my little sister instead of my little wife."

But she clung to him, pale and terrified. "Oh! I'm sure aunt has been speaking against me, and so you won't marry me; and I'm so afraid of strangers, and hate young people; and I don't want anything changed. What do you fear?"

"That the time may come when you will doubt and misunderstand me; when you will cease to open your heart to me as freely as you do now; and yet every day should but strengthen our mutual faith, for there is but one thing that can insure the peace and happiness of married life, and that binds together in the closest bonds characters the most dissimilar,—perfect confidence!

Whilst this exists between us we are safe; but if once fear or mistrust divide us, even by a thought, we are lost to each other for ever. If at times you see me grave and abstracted, remember how anxious a profession mine is; but whatever I may appear to others, to you, my wife, my heart will never be closed. Let me share your every pleasure, your every pain, however trifling. Let nothing wean your heart from mine, or come between you and your husband—your best friend, your safest guide and protector. Only trust me, Winifred,—trust me through all! Bear with my natural roughness, even hardness of character, which your little hand alone could have power to soften and humanize, and my love, such love as in my hard, solitary life I never even dreamt of, will repay you. Day by day you will grow nearer and dearer to me. All that I have—all that the world gives as the reward of my labours shall be yours. Ask of me what you will, freely, unreservedly; exact of me any sacrifice that can in any way conduce to your happiness. Only let me make you happy; let me feel that you look upon me as your friend—that you *trust* me.”

So did James Cameron plead with his “child-wife,” not for her love, but only for her faith in his. And she answered by soft monosyllables, and, holding his hand, played with it abstractedly, turning her small white fingers about his, and wondering vaguely what it all meant, and why he spoke so very gravely and looked so dull. It made her almost as miserable as one of Aunt Deborah’s lectures. This was their last long talk together. On returning to the house, they found supper ready, and afterwards the two old friends had a cosy chat over past times, which lasted as chats over past times always do last. Meanwhile Winifred, wearying of a conversation in which she had no personal interest, slipped off quietly to bed. The doctor, therefore, did not see her again until next morning at breakfast, when she looked very cold and sleepy, and, having drunk down a cup of tea, crept shivering to the fire, intent

only on getting warm. As he was to start by the 9.30 express, and he had a walk of three miles before him, he rose from the breakfast-table as soon as that very profuse meal was over. Miss Deborah proposed accompanying him to the end of the lane, from whence there was a short cut over the fields; but Winifred said nothing, though her aunt treated her to many suggestive looks and hints. At last, the doctor having left the room to fetch his railway plaid, she turned sharply round upon the unconscious offender.

"Winifred, throw that shawl over your shoulders and accompany James Cameron to the end of the lane."

"Yes, aunt." She obeyed this order as she would have done any other her aunt might have issued; and the doctor, on his return, found her wrapped in a thick shawl ready to accompany him. He smiled, well pleased, stroked her bright hair, and called her a good child.

The end of the lane was soon reached,—too soon for the doctor, who liked to have the young girl at his side, and began to feel something almost like pain at parting from her.

"And you will be sure, quite sure, to return and marry me before the winter sets in?" she asked, as they lingered a moment at the stile. "You won't forget your promise when you get back to London, will you?"

"I already look upon myself as a married man. I only wish I could have carried you off with me."

"I wish you could; but it will be all quite different now that I am engaged. The time will soon pass; but come as soon as you can."

"And you won't fret, and indulge in foolish fancies?" She gave the required promise, then bade him quietly good-by, holding out her hand and offering her lips for the expected kiss; and for the first time James Cameron stooped and kissed her. As he did so a feeling, an emotion hitherto unknown, thrilled through his whole being. That kiss, like the forbidden fruit of Paradise, had

opened his eyes. He now noticed, for the first time, that the little face uplifted to his was beautiful, with a strange, weird kind of beauty; that the hair, over which the morning sunlight rippled, was bright and abundant; the eyes large and liquid; the lips full, soft, and yielding to every impression, as a woman's lips should be. Hitherto he had merely looked upon her as a poor forsaken child, to be cherished and protected; he now saw her in a new light altogether—as the woman and the wife, and realised, by a sudden overwhelming instinct, how inexpressibly dear she might be to him beyond all he had ever thought or dreamt. “God bless you, my darling!” he said, in a broken voice; and not trusting himself to another word or look, he turned from the stile and went on his lonely way.

* * * *

When Dr. Cameron returned home from his holiday trip sooner than Grace Ingles had expected, she found him looking even more worn and jaded than when he had started. It was not until the third evening after his return, when she came to bid him good-night, which she did as regularly as she said her prayers, that he told her of his approaching marriage. Her first thought was that he had gone suddenly mad, and it was long before the fact, as a fact, could be forced upon her. That the master who, from his youth up, had resisted the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, could so far fall from his high estate as to marry, had never entered into her category of possibilities; the blow, therefore, was as great as it was unexpected. But she was far too sensible a woman, and too deeply attached to her master, to make a scene, or express all she felt; she listened, therefore, in grim silence to his brief explanation. Only, when he told her he was marrying a friendless orphan girl through pity, she observed, drily, that for her part she would rather he had said for love, as it would be much the most natural of the two.

"And when was the lady to be expected in Russell Square?"

As soon as he could get away for a fortnight, he would go to Scotland to fetch her. Of the Paris trip he said nothing, being half ashamed of his own weakness in having yielded to such a request. "But of course, Grace," he added hurriedly, and somewhat anxiously, "your position will in no way be altered; you will conduct my house as heretofore. Miss Morgan is but a child—a young, inexperienced thing—who will in no way interfere with you; indeed I shall need your services doubly, as there will be two to care for instead of one."

"And her name—her christian name, I mean? When I mention her in my prayers, I would wish it to be by name."

"Thank you, Grace. Her name's Winifred,—a pretty name, isn't it? and she's pretty too, and as gentle as she's pretty. It will be pleasant for you to have a young thing about the house, some one to love and care for, won't it, Grace?"

"That's as time proves, Master James; but she'll be your wife and my mistress, and as such I'll serve her faithfully, if the Lord allow."

The doctor breathed a deep sigh of relief. Like most men, he shrank from anything like a scene; and the truth is, he had rather dreaded one on the present occasion. She might have reproached him, wept, gone into hysterics, or even given him notice to quit,—a catastrophe too terrible to contemplate. But she had done no such thing, and he was really grateful to her for her forbearance, and the philosophic calm with which she had heard his extraordinary announcement.

Calmly, too, she bade him good-night, and went about her nightly duty of locking up and seeing to the due extinguishing of fire and light. It was not until safely locked in her own room that she gave way to her feelings, gravely shaking her head, and muttering the while, "Charity, indeed! Well, I've heard of people doing

many strange things for charity,—taking to queer bonnets and long black veils, building schools for maid-servants to learn French, dancing, and piano, and so on; but I never yet heard of anyone marrying out of charity. Nor would the master have done it either, if the child hadn't been a pretty, tender creature, as he says. Ah well! young and pretty and tender is better than old and ugly, and his life's lonesome enough; and if she's as good as she's pretty, she'll lie near his heart and warm it a bit, and cheer him up with her winsome ways. The Lord be praised! she comes fra the auld country; so she's of the right sort, and that's a comfort!" That night Grace Ingles joined to her master's name that of Winifred.

CHAPTER XI.

"To think of poor dear Mr. Lamb being taken ill so inopportunately, when they so relied upon him to make an effect and get money out of the congregation—and such a fashionable congregation! and when everyone expected him, and he'd written his sermon. So very provoking!"

"Most unfortunate, indeed, and a cruel disappointment to me. I had so looked forward to sitting under him in a fashionable West End church; and as I shall, of course, come down handsomely in the morning in my own church, sixpence would do in the evening; for they have bags, not plates, at St. Mark's—a plan I highly approve of, and would have universally adopted. Those plates actually force the money out of your pockets. How could I, for instance, give less than a gold piece, when I sit just under the pulpit, and when Mrs. Smith, who's in the same pew, makes a point of putting her gold sovereign ready on the desk before her, with her salts and lace pocket-handkerchief, so that everyone may see it during the service; and her husband's business

not half what Snookes' is—and he owing us ever so much, which we shall never get; for, as Snookes says, we only see the colour of their money in church; and this is what they call charity and religion, I suppose."

It was Mrs. Snookes who spoke—Mrs. Snookes, one of the portliest and wealthiest of Mr. Cheerman's flock; and it was Mrs. Lovell, who was only a degree less wealthy and portly, who answered, "Mr. Lamb declares he caught his cold at the Workhouse, where he went to see an old woman who was dying. Likely enough—he's not accustomed to such things; most imprudent of him to risk his precious health; anybody would have done as well for the Workhouse, but it's quite another thing to disappoint a fashionable congregation. He knows so well the respect due to them, and has such a pleasant, gentlemanly way of putting things, that he always sends you home comfortable and well satisfied in your mind. And that's the right kind of preaching, I'm sure. Sunday's a day of rest—the Bible says so; and you go to church out of respect to your clergyman, and because it's quite the proper thing to do; and no minister has the right to frighten you out of your wits by telling you you're a miserable sinner, in danger of hell fire."

"Certainly not; and Mr. Lamb's far too much of a gentleman to make use of any such coarse expressions to a respectable congregation. What a pity it is that he can't preach to-morrow, and no time now to get a proper substitute."

"A *proper* substitute! you may well say that. But who do you think *has* been asked to preach; you will never guess."

No, Mrs. Snookes could not guess, though she tried very hard; and at last her visitor had compassion on her—"Mr. Thornton."

"Impossible! It would be a downright insult to such a fashionable congregation—at the West End, too! and all going with the hope of hearing Mr. Lamb. It is really cruel to the poor young man. He won't even have time to write a sermon for the occasion; and if

he broke down in addressing a parcel of school-children and teachers, what will he do now? I really think you must have been misinformed. But, of course, I shall not go; it would be hardly worth while to have the horses out, only to hear poor *Mr. Thornton*. But let us still hope it was a false rumour."

No, Mrs. Snookes, it is no false rumour; so keep your horses in the stable, and your sixpence in your pocket, for it is irrevocably recorded in the book of fate that Cyril Thornton preaches to-morrow at St. Mark's, in behalf of the poor destitute of the backslums and alleys of London. Only at the eleventh hour—at 5.30 P.M. on Saturday—did he receive due notice of what was expected of him, and, strange to say, he consented at once, without hesitation or fear. There was no time, it is true, to write a sermon; but as it was of all subjects the one upon which he had felt and pondered most deeply, and upon which he could best speak from experience, he had soon collected, in the form of notes, the chief points upon which he wished to speak, and as he laid them aside with a silent prayer, he felt neither exultation nor dismay at the thought of the honour that awaited him—the honour of acting as substitute to the first curate, and preaching the evening sermon to the fashionables of the West End! Perhaps just then he was less alive than usual to outward impressions; for having now his curate's holiday, he was to start early on Monday morning for Manor Farm. In the old day-dreams he had laid out the month's holiday very differently—Rome and ruins; Switzerland and ravines; the North Pole, with bears for companions and tallow candles for food; these, and many other romantic tours had he planned for the future; but hard work, poor pay, and constant mortifications had blotted out all such airy visions, to give place to others of a far more sober character. His one day-dream now was to get home; never was friendless schoolboy more home-sick. To see once more the dear old beautiful place, to inhale the fresh country breezes, so doubly precious after the hot, stifling, fetid air of the

city—to hear father's "God bless you, my boy"—to feel old Hal's hearty shake of the hand, and be petted and spoilt by mother and Birdie. "Poor Birdie! she would be sorry to hear of the downfall of all his bright hopes, for he would tell her all—not his privations and hard work, and the systematic ill-usage and barefaced cheating he underwent from his landlady—no, not that, only his own folly in ever dreaming of fame and fortune; but she would be comforted when she heard of the success of his labours among the poor and the godless, and she would soon learn to view his mission as he now did himself, not as the stepping-stone to fame, but rather as the ladder that God himself has erected between heaven and earth. And would it not be better, far better, the day's work over, to stand thus surrounded by those whom his hand had helped up the steep ascent than to reach alone the highest pinnacle to which fame could lead him?" Thus humbly and hopefully would he speak of the future, and she would say, as he could from his heart, that it was well with him.

In such a frame of mind it was that Cyril went to preach the much talked-of sermon at St. Mark's.

Are there not certain times in the lives of all when everything goes wrong with us—when chance crowds upon chance, ill-luck upon ill-luck, until "the burden laid upon us seems greater than we can bear"? At such times it is that the cowardly have recourse to suicide. But, on the other hand, are there not also times when, with but little effort, or even consciousness, on our part, all seems to favour us? Obstacles we deemed insurmountable disappear as if by magic, or are suddenly recognised as helps rather than hindrances; that for which we have long striven with all the force of mind and will, apparently in vain, falls into our lap, to our own exceeding wonder when we have perchance ceased to strive, or even, it may be, to desire it.

Such a time had now come for Cyril, though he knew it not. But half-an-hour before he had knelt at the death-bed of one who, after a long and chequered life

of prosperity and adversity, ups and downs, joys and sorrows, love and hate, and whatever else makes up the sum of human things, could calmly, and without bitterness, in the last solemn retrospect, pronounce all that the restless human heart holds for precious, and prizes most, to be vanity and vexation of spirit, and with his latest breath thank God, not for the blessings, the ease, the success, that had too often proved but snares to weaken and enervate him, but for the trials, the hardships that, making him strong to bear, to battle with, and to conquer, had made of life a stern but noble reality, of death a great and certain hope. And so, with steadfast, upturned eyes and smiling lips, alone, the last of his race, the old man died, his head pillowed upon the breast of the young and faithful minister, who had been to him as a ministering angel in his last days of pain and weakness.

Very reverently had Cyril closed the glazing eyes and folded the aged hands to their long and welcome rest, and gone his way with a calm and chastened sadness at his heart—a holy quiet, as though the shadowing wing of the Everlasting were closing him about, and shutting out from him, for a while at least, the world, with all its jarring passions; and so, dead to all earthly emotions, but with his whole soul thrilling to the more subtle and poetic elements of religion, he passed from the hush of the Sabbath-eve without, to the solemn hush of the church within, and the shadow of the yawning grave entered with him, and along it he passed—to fame; the passing bell, for the one life now for ever closed, being as the trumpet-note of that other life that could only now be said to begin.

Everything, that evening, seemed to favour the young preacher's inspiration. St. Mark's itself, a really fine building, simple in architecture, and imposing in its form of worship, was the happy medium between whitewashed popery and dissent—not so high as to become ludicrous, nor so low as to disgust. The service, always impressive,

was rendered doubly so by the rich voices of the choir answering to the full deep tones of the organ.

Cyril, whose ear, painfully attuned to harmony, had so long been outraged by the nasal rendering of Tate and Brady, set to the most primitive tunes, listened, wrapt and entranced, to the grand Gregorian Chant, and felt as if under some holy and mysterious spell as he mounted the pulpit stairs, knelt one moment in prayer, then, rising, cast a quiet, dreamy look around.

How often are failure and success divided but by a hair's breadth. Far removed as he was from earth, had his eye just then lighted upon the "body," or even a single member of the body, the sight would have been fatal to his inspirations. Fortunately, however, his eye lighted only on strange forms and faces, and as with a slight flutter all settled down into an attitude of hushed attention, he opened the Book, and gave out the text, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." Then he closed the Book, and the eyes of all being fastened upon him, he began to say unto them, "This day is this gospel fulfilled in your ears."

It was well, perhaps, that never having been called upon to attack the pockets of his hearers, he had not, as it were, learned the trick of the trade. Charity, "that most excellent gift, the very bond of peace and of all righteousness," was still to him rather the emblem of universal love and good-will than mere almsgiving; and so he preached. Hard facts, harder statistics, he avoided altogether, and, while pleading with passionate eloquence for the poor, the ignorant, and the lost, he failed to remember how much of the money he might wring from those he addressed would go to guardians, committees, public dinners, printed reports, advertisements, &c.; and the congregation, listening to the burning words that poured forth like the impetuous rush of some mighty torrent long pent up, forgot it too. Not only as the preacher did he plead with them, but as man to man, brother to brother, soul to soul. Vividly he depicted the misery

that beset him at every turn; with thrilling force he described that death-bed scene so lately witnessed, prophesying to each the same solemn retrospect, the same account to be rendered by time to eternity. Not for one institution alone did he implore their aid, but for the whole suffering world, groaning and travailing in pain together until now, appealing to them by every sacred tie, every human affection—to the strong on behalf of the weak, to the mother for the child, to the holy for the tempted and the fallen. Not one among them but had something to give. To-day was theirs; whose might be to-morrow? Theirs was still the *power* to give; oh! that God would also grant them the *will*. He Himself awaited their decision, and who could say what mighty consequences might not hang upon it? Even now might the finger of Divine Justice, ready to record over the threshold of many a prosperous home the doom of thousands of our merchant princes—bankruptcy, paralysis, sudden death, selfmurder,—be arrested by one act of mercy, one tear of sympathy. Then from history, as from daily experience, he proved how terrible a curse was the love of money—undermining the strength, sapping the very life of nations, by enervating and degrading them. “And is it not this curse,” he exclaimed, “that brands the brow of the Jew, making him a byword among the nations? Could it work more fatally, when one of the nation himself told me that what prevented him, as well as many of his brethren, from being converted was the fear of losing that success in all monetary affairs that proverbially attends his race—their sole inheritance, their fatal birthday, their glory and their shame!”

In conclusion he appealed to them in the name of Him, the betrayed Lord and Master, who, however denied as the God, is at least allowed by His bitterest enemies to have lived, and loved, and suffered as the Man, and whose testimony of Himself was the prophecy of the text, in which He is set forth as the Preacher, the Healer, the Saviour.

So ended the sermon.

Not once had the preacher referred to his notes: he needed them not. He spoke from his heart, from the depth of his conviction, from the actual experience of daily life. Thoroughly in earnest himself, he carried his hearers along with him; and accustomed as were the congregation of St. Mark's to a hard, dogmatic style of preaching, they now listened with almost breathless interest to a burst of eloquence as original and untutored as it was powerful and effective. His voice, his manner, his rapid, almost vehement utterance softening into appealing tenderness as he sought to rouse the gentler emotions of the heart, held his hearers entranced and spell-bound. When at last he paused, all drew a long breath; and, lo! before him lay the scene his fancy had so often imaged forth—the realization of his proudest dreams. By the mere force of his eloquence he had triumphed over every hostile influence. The infidel forgot to scoff, the sceptic to sneer, the presumptuous to cavil. A stranger and unknown, his first words had arrested the attention of every man, woman, and child in the crowded building. A spirit mightier even than that of infidelity and the law of reason had breathed over the dry bones, and behold they moved, they quickened, for a while at least, into life and thought and sympathy. His triumph was complete; he had bowed the heart of that vast assembly as the heart of one man.

But a stranger and unknown, as we have said, there was no one to congratulate him, or to tell him that he was famous.

As he passed hastily through the churchyard, closely buttoned up to the chin in his greatcoat—for to his fevered blood the night air struck chill and unfriendly—he saw, without, however, remarking them, groups of eager talkers clustering here and there. As all made way for him, heads were involuntarily uncovered, and bright eyes—brighter for their recent tears—followed his muffled form with reverential interest. But of all this he guessed nothing; nor how many a tender sigh was wafted towards the unknown region hallowed by his presence;

nor how his face, beautiful and inspired, haunted, that night, the sleepless pillow of many a West End belle, who for his sake vowed a weekly pilgrimage to the far East, in spite of heat, distance, sneering husbands, and fuming papas; nor how many a sentimental letter and passion-breathing verse, blending into one the tenderer mysteries of religion and the tenderest mysteries of love, were indited, with the invaluable assistance of a full moon, by young ladies in elegant *négligés* and with unbound, dishevelled locks. With returning daylight and more sober reflection most of these effusions were wisely consigned to the flames; but some few found their way to the post, and from thence to the hands—of the Reverend Algernon Lamb! for that gentleman's name having been everywhere announced, and not contradicted, no one for a moment doubted that it was to him they had listened.

Suffering from a violent attack of influenza—swathed in cold-water bandages, and cased in flannel—with swollen eyes and nose—the victim of homoeopathy, hydropathy, and the motherly attentions of his affectionate landlady—kept low on gruel and treacle-posset—viewing the outer world through the watery medium of a catarrhal cold, with bitter misanthropy raging at his heart—what pen is eloquent enough to depict his feelings, as he opened and read the tender missives? At first flattered, then perplexed, then startled, and with a faint suspicion of the truth flitting hazily through his confused brain, he rang the bell.

Landlady, bandages, and gruel appeared simultaneously.

“Do you know who preached at St. Mark's, instead of me?”

“Yes, sir; it was Mr. Thornton, sir.”

“Mr. Thornton? nonsense!”

“Yes, indeed it was Mr. Thornton, sir; and Mr. Nicholson, the incumbent, sir, has been here to call upon him, and thank him for his fine discourse. Such a collection, he says, hasn't been known for years—never since a black man preached who'd been a cannibal, and eaten

ever so many missionaries. But as Mr. Thornton was already off, Mr. Nicholson went to Mr. Cheerman, sir."

Where had Mrs. Brindle got all this valuable and correct information? Mr. Cheerman lived next door, and the gardens had one common wall, over which passed the family news more surely and swiftly than along the telegraphic wires.

Poor Mr. Lamb! A violent fit of sneezing put a stop to all further conversation, and feeling doubly bitter, misanthropical, and miserable, he collapsed with a faint groan and shiver, and disappeared altogether behind a wall of bandages and flannel.

Meanwhile Cyril had seen the accomplishment of his last day-dream. He had received his father's blessing, and Harry's hearty shake of the hand, and was being petted by mother and Birdie to his heart's content. He had kept his word, and told Mary everything, speaking humbly but hopefully; and she had pitied, and cheered, and encouraged him, looking up into his face with bright, loving eyes, unshadowed by a doubt. And now, too happy in the present to think of the past or the future, they sat together in the rose-covered porch, and Cyril told her how glad he was to be home again—how doubly dear everything was to him after the year's absence—how often, when tired, disappointed, and disheartened, he had pictured that very scene, and it had given him fresh hope and courage. He told her, too,—for he told her everything that passed through his mind,—that no place could ever seem like home without her presence, and how often he had longed for her in the dark dingy lodging into which, somehow, no sunlight ever seemed to come.

And as he spoke on, in a subdued and dreamy tone, sitting at her feet, his head resting in her lap, and watching the evening clouds floating majestically along the sky, Mary listened, and smiled, and blushed, and told him in her abrupt, straight-forward manner how dreadfully she had missed him, and how all at home had counted the days to his return; and then, stooping over to look

into his face, she wished, with a sudden throb of emotion, half pain, half pleasure, that he were still the schoolboy and she the little girl, that she might throw her arms round his neck and kiss him, and tell him how dearly she loved him, and how often she longed, with a great longing, to leave all—all that was not him—and follow him, whither—she cared not—to joy or sorrow, wealth or poverty, life or death; her love would ask no questions. But all this she must not tell him, until—well, one day he would be great, and would ask her for her love, and then she would tell him all!

CHAPTER XII.

A soft foggy air, and a sea as calm as a lake; but there are those who will trust no sea, however calm, and all the female passengers of the "Royal Victoria"—the doubting and the fearful among them at least—had already selected and shaken down into their respective berths—all but one! A remarkably stout lady, who, finding it easier no doubt to sit than lie, kept resolutely to the first posture, with a snub-nosed Blenheim curled up in her lap.

A shrill whistle, and certain premonitory sounds above, told of the dreaded moment having arrived—the moment of departure when the cabin door opened once more, and a lady and gentleman entered. The latter, tall, gaunt, and hard-featured, was not deemed worthy a second glance; the lady, on the contrary, attracted instant and general attention.

She was very small, and might almost have passed for a child, but for the extreme elegance of her half-mourning toilette. Such a love of a bonnet! pronounced the ladies, and from out of it glimmered palely a mass of gold-brown hair, dressed in the most curious fashion of its own, or rather not dressed at all, for it waved loosely over brow and eyes, then wandered away as if

in mere caprice over the ears, and coiled itself into something half roll, half curl, at the back of the head.

The gentleman sent a keen glance round the cabin; the lady's large blue eyes wandered hither and thither with restless sidelong glances; evidently her survey was not a satisfactory one, for she turned to her companion and said in an injured tone,—

“You see, James, it's just as I said; all the best places are taken.”

“Naturally enough—first come, first served; what a pity that you were not the *first* instead of the *last*.”

A pout on the little lady's lip betrayed her; she had certainly been keeping her companion waiting. So at least decided the more clear sighted of the passengers.

The stout lady, however, whose heart was as expansive as her person, did not confine herself to staring and speculating, but pointed to an empty berth next to her own, and into it the gentleman saw his little charge comfortably settled. This done, he disappeared.

“Oh dear,” sighed the little lady, “I feel so ill; I'm sure we shall have a rough passage. My husband says we sha'n't, but——”

“No, no, dear, it'll be all smooth and comfortable, you'll see,” said the stout lady, encouragingly; “the captain says so, and he *must* know—of course he must. Your *husband*, you said, dear?”

“Yes, my husband; we're returning from our honeymoon.”

“Deary me! why, whoever would have guessed it? I thought, to be sure, that it was your pa.”

“Did you? Oh no; papa died last spring, and I'm in mourning for him still; but he was quite different from Dr. Cameron.”

“Dr. who? Who did you say, dear?”

“Dr. Cameron; but please don't talk any more or I shall be quite ill.”

They were fairly off now, steaming away in right good earnest, the sea as calm as a lake still; but it *was* the sea, and the simple fact of its being so caused a weak

voice proceeding from the berth just above that of the last comer, to utter the one word, "Steward!"

Mrs. Cameron caught the ominous word, and responded to it at once in an injured tone, "Oh please, don't be ill just over me; it would be so very unkind, for of course I should be ill myself directly."

"Now don't take on so,—don't, there's a dear," entreated the stout lady, who found everything easier than to hold her tongue; "it's nothing but a false alarm at starting. She won't be ill, take my word for it, not she; she's too much of a lady to do anything of the kind, inconveniencing the other passengers. Take my advice, my dear," she continued, raising her voice so that it might reach the occupant of the upper berth; "and hold the bridge of your nose firmly on each side towards the eyes—it's an infallible remedy. I never tried it myself," she proceeded, sinking her voice once more to a confidential key; "but my nephew—such a promising young man! commercial traveller for a large mercantile house in the city—a remarkably fine young man, to be sure! and so popular with the ladies—could have married ever so many heiresses and princesses too. There was a grand Russian princess he met in Switzerland proposed to him, after his having saved her from going down a precipice; and his employer, who said to me again and again, 'Mrs. Palmer, that young man's a credit to the firm!' and so he was, and there's no knowing to what he might have risen; but as I always said to my sister, 'Jane,' said I, 'we shall never rear that child,' and she found my words come true when it was too late. He went off like the snuff of a candle."

"From sea-sickness?" inquired Mrs. Cameron, in an alarmed tone.

"No, my dear; but as I was saying——"

Whether the occupant of the upper berth took the stout lady's hints about gentility, or her advice, or whether her sudden faintness was only in very fact a false alarm, certain it is that she was not ill, nor was the little lady below, although she told her grave-looking

husband when he came to see her that she felt very strange, and was quite sure that she should be ill before they reached Dover.

The stout lady meanwhile, who seemed in no way affected except perhaps by the heat—for she mopped her face profusely, after trying vainly to get up a conversation with her neighbours on every side—betook herself for comfort to a capacious basket, well supplied with biscuits, sandwiches, and brandy and water.

From time to time the snub-nosed Blenheim, who may have found the lap of friendship somewhat too hot a resting-place, opened one eye, wagged his tail deprecatingly, and panted for air. But every such expression of warmth of feeling was met by the mild but plaintive rebuke, accompanied by a sympathetic look around, "Don't, dear, don't! when you see we're all in such a trouble!" and the culprit, ashamed and humbled, drew in his tongue and disappeared.

A clattering of chains overhead, and a sudden rush of male protectors to the cabin, told of the pains and perils of the passage being over.

"Well, you have not been ill after all, little one!" observed Dr. Cameron, as he claimed his wife, fastened her shawl and bonnet, loaded himself with her belongings, drew her arm within his, and fought his way up the crowded cabin stairs. "But are you sure, quite sure, that you have left nothing behind *this* time?"

"Yes, she was quite sure, until they reached the landing-place, when she discovered that her travelling-bag—her beautiful Parisian travelling-bag!—had been left behind.

"Really?" said the doctor, incredulously. "I did not see it—it was not on the table or on your berth."

"Then the stout lady's sitting upon it; oh dear! and she is *so* stout!"

"Yes, the stout lady *had* sat upon it, and was sitting upon it still, when, on returning to the cabin, they found her as they had left her, waiting for something, though for what, unless perhaps the awakening of the Blenheim

by a natural process, would be difficult to decide. Her confusion and dismay on hearing of what she was accused were too great for even the relief of words. Too agitated to move, herself, she made three feeble, ineffectual attempts to push off the Blenheim, allowing him, however, to sink back and recurl himself more tightly than ever. At last, with the gentleman's assistance, she was got on to her feet, but too late to save the bag, to which the weight of circumstances had proved fatal.

"Never mind, dear," whispered the stern, hard-featured man, with a degree of tenderness of which the stout lady would have deemed him incapable; "you shall have another twice as pretty. Things such as that, that money can replace, are not worth fretting about."

The young wife, who had seemed half inclined to cry, smiled and brightened up at once, though she did not thank him—no, not even by a look.

"Jane, just run to the street door; I'm sure I hear the carriage. Ah yes, there it is, and no mistake this time, or my ears have mightily deceived me."

Half-a-dozen times at least that day had Grace Ingle's ears played her false, but this time their report was a true one; and with a strange beating at her heart, that she set down to palpitations, indigestion, anything and everything but emotion, she hurried down to be the first to welcome her master and his bride.

"Well, Grace, here we are, half frozen, and very glad to get home again."

The doctor's voice had more of life and joyousness in it than she had ever heard before, and jumping first out of the carriage he lifted from it a little figure so closely muffled up in shawls and wraps as to be quite invisible, and literally carried it into the hall.

"Your mistress is very cold, tired, and hungry, Grace; I leave her in your hands whilst I look after the luggage. Ah, Matthews! there you are—quite well, I hope?"

"Yes, here I am, and quite well, I thank you, sir,

answered that doleful personage, who just then appeared, looking longer, lankier, and more funereal than ever.

“And old Tip’s also here to welcome his master home! Poor Tip, poor old fellow!”

The doctor stooped down to caress his shaggy old friend, who was rolling at his feet in an ecstasy of delight. He had known so little affection in his life—that stern, self-concentrated man.

Meanwhile Grace had conducted Mrs. Cameron to her bed-room, where blazed a fire that would have rejoiced the heart of any traveller. Winifred sprang towards it with a glad cry. “Oh, how delightful to see a real English fire again; it was so cold on board, and in the train too, till James wrapped me up.”

She was crouching down upon the rug, so that Grace had to stoop very low to relieve her of all her wraps. “And so this is his wife and my mistress” she thought, as retreating to a respectful distance she scanned the little lady narrowly—“this tiny creature with the white childish face, so different from anything I’ve ever seen before—‘young and tender’ he might well say, and needing a mother’s care far more than a husband’s, I ween. Poor, wee, bit bairnie! it’ll be nae sa difficult to love her for her own sake as well as for his.” The longer Grace looked, the more did she seem drawn to her master’s wife by the same undefined feeling of pity that had attracted him to her from the first, and chained him irrevocably to her for life. But Grace was not accustomed to give vent to the promptings of her heart; long years of faithful service were far more in her line than one word of mere idle profession; and it was in a tone the reverse of sympathetic that she remarked that she “must go and see about the dinner.”

At these words a light seemed to dawn upon Mrs. Cameron. “Ah, then you’re Grace—Grace Ingles—the doctor’s cook and housekeeper?”

“Yes, ma’am, I’ve served the master now going on fourteen years and——.”

“I know all that; he told me about you before we

married, and he said you'd be very kind to me, and save me all care and trouble."

"And so, with the Lord's help, I will," answered Grace, deeply moved; "and if you'd just give me your hand, ma'am, to show that you accept my service."

Mrs. Cameron did so, and surely never before had Grace held so small soft and downy a hand in her coarse, work-hardened palm; but somehow its touch did not satisfy her; it lay in her clasp like some dead thing—warm still, but pulseless, lifeless; there was no answering pressure, and no kindly response in the face one moment raised to hers, half in surprise. Instinctively she felt a something wanting—something too vague and impalpable to be put into words, but which, nevertheless, perplexed and troubled her.

"Of course," continued Mrs. Cameron "you will continue to manage the house."

"Under your orders, ma'am."

"Orders! oh you mean about the dinner? Well you can always cook what you like, only there are certain things I can't eat, such as pork and veal, and oatmeal porridge, and ducks—I got so tired of them all at Aunt Deborah's; and I don't like mutton chops either, or——" Here the doctor's entrance put a stop to all further confidences between the joint mistresses of his house.

As he came and stood before the fire Winifred sprang to her feet, and went nestling up to his side, slipping her little hand into his. Nothing of all this escaped Grace, nor the smile with which he put his arm round her and drew her very closely to him; and meeting Matthews on the stairs she confided to him—for Matthews was the only one privileged to her confidence—that she had certainly never seen her master look so happy.

Yes, James Cameron was happy; happy in the possession of that little creature to love, and shelter in his love; happy too that the terrible ordeal to which a moment of weakness had doomed him was over, and he once more at home. Never had its orderly quiet been as welcome as now, after the glare and bustle of the

gay Parisian hotel. It was happiness, real happiness, to stand with his back to that bright English fire, and think that the fortnight's probation was over, and that with the morrow would recommence his labours; for the dreaded honey-moon had proved even a greater trial than he had supposed. Never had he been so thoroughly out of his element—the grave, sedate, deep-thinking Scotchman playing the part of devoted bridegroom in the gayest capital of the world! It was a position no admiring friend or patient could have realised, and which he could hardly realise himself. But he bore all uncomplainingly, regarding that first great sacrifice to Hymen from a philosophic rather than a sentimental point of view, not only as a necessary though somewhat derogatory folly—the only one a sensible man need ever commit—but as one of the many fatal consequences of man's fall, and his intimate connexion with the inferior and less rational sex. Very patiently too had he borne with Winifred's constant and inconsiderate demands upon his time and purse; indulging her wherever he could, at no matter what personal sacrifice, but never at the sacrifice of his principles, which were too rigid to allow of any compromise. And yet the struggle between them and his tender love for his young wife was a hard one; and a cloud on the smooth childish brow, a dimness in the great wistful eyes, or a troubled look in the little white face, gave him a greater pain at his heart than she perhaps had ever felt or could ever have understood. Now, however, he devoutly hoped and believed that with the wedding trip ended all his matrimonial troubles. Winifred brought home and placed under the kind care and direction of Grace, he had nothing to fear for her welfare and happiness; and it was with a sense of infinite relief that he drew her to him, and said heartily, "Isn't it pleasant to be home again? I really think the return almost worth the absence; what do you say, little wife?"

She said nothing, but she was clinging close to his side, her bright head on his shoulder; and feeling how entirely she was his own—a very part of himself—he

opened to her his heart more freely than he had ever done before, revealing to her somewhat of that inner life that is none the less an actual part of our existence because it lies so deep down, hidden away from sight.

He was still talking of the future in a half-gay, half-serious strain, when interrupted by the boisterous entrance of Tip, who came bounding up to his master's feet, leaping and barking, to Winifred's no slight alarm.

"Oh! send him out, please send him out!" she cried; "I'm so afraid of strange dogs, and I'm sure he'll bite me, he's so ugly and looks so cross."

"Bite you! Tip bite his master's wife! why he'd protect you until death. Come, Tip, down on your knees and tell your mistress that you swear to love, honour, and obey her, and that you'll keep your oath of allegiance as few of us poor mortals do."

Tip came crawling up to her feet, gently wagging his tail.

"He was my sole friend and companion till God gave you to me, Winifred, and his love is worth something, though, like his master, he's rough, rude, and unlovable. Only trust him, give him your little hand to kiss in token that you accept his homage, and you'll have a friend and protector for life."

"I can't, he looks so fierce, and I'm sure, he'd bite me."

"Fie, Winifred! do you think that little hand less dear to me than it is to you? This is but a bad beginning of the perfect trust in me you promised; you have placed your whole future into my hands, and the first time I make trial of your faith I find it wanting." This was said playfully, but with a certain ring of earnestness in the voice.

"I'm sure he'd bite me," repeated Winifred, and putting her hands behind her, like a wilful, half-frightened child, she shrank away from her husband's side.

"Oh, Tip, Tip, see what you have done!" cried the doctor; "you've put asunder what God and man joined

together, and been the first to make my wife shrink from her husband's protecting arm!"

How little did he think that the words so lightly spoken were fated to become a prophecy.

CHAPTER XIII.

HAD the feminine world of London been suddenly informed of the bombardment of that city by the French, the news would hardly have caused more astonishment and dismay than did that of Doctor Cameron's marriage. That he should have married at all was a thing not easily to be forgiven. What right had he to forswear the celibacy to which the general voice had doomed him? But that he should take up with the penniless orphan of an Irish adventurer—he, with his assured income and position,—was an act of folly passing human belief. Hands and eyes were thrown up in actual horror. It was a crying shame—a positive insult to every marriageable lady, and every match-making mother of the community. Oh! how bitterly did the latter now regret the prize they had thus yielded without a struggle! A little more perseverance,—a sharper and more direct attack, and it would have been theirs! What a chance thrown away! What a match it would have been for some plain elder daughter of a good house, universally recommended by friends and relatives to widowers and grave professional men, as being such a capital nurse and housekeeper, and altogether such a treasure!

All called as soon as possible upon the envied bride, and had particular meetings at particular houses to discuss her afterwards. Her childish prettiness of course told very much against her, and heightened the doctor's offence tenfold. But one point in her favour—and to her eager, curious visitors it was a very great one—was her readiness to be communicative and answer all questions, of no matter how private a character, fully

and freely. From the doctor they got about as much information as might have been expected. When congratulated or complimented upon his choice, he bowed; all questions he unceremoniously cut short; and whenever a strong-minded lady, emboldened by the novelty of his position, ventured on a joke, something in the fixed look of the cold hard eye made her first bite, then hold her tongue.

As to the *doctor*, matrimony had in no way changed him; and in the closer intimacy of his home-life few ever saw him. Indeed, all took very good care to pay their visits at his house when quite sure of not finding him there.

As Mrs. Cameron's popularity increased, that of her husband decreased. Though young, pretty, and rich, she never went to balls, theatres, promenades, etc.; she was, therefore, an ill-used wife, and the doctor a jealous tyrant, an austere bigot, a harsh, unfeeling despot.

But of such dark rumours James Cameron was left in blessed ignorance. Absorbed more than ever in his profession, he never even paused to question his own heart, much less the world's verdict. If the first six months' experience of married life hardly realised the visions he had once had of peace, happiness, and sympathy, he loved his wife none the less dearly for that. He took her as she was, and made the best of a bargain that all his friends pronounced a very bad one.

So passed the winter and the spring, and one evening, late in the month of May, returning home after a long and anxious day's work, for sickness was rife in London just then, he found Grace awaiting him in the hall with a very sour face, and the announcement that dinner had been ready half-an-hour, and was as likely spoilt as not. "And such a slice of salmon!" she pathetically added; "no finer could be found in our own lochs; but it's little worth eating now, I should say."

The doctor, glad to be home, and with an appetite sharpened by long abstinence, felt in no way inclined to quarrel with either Grace or the salmon, and so he told

her; but the saying, that "There's many a slip between the cup and the lip," was never more verified than in his case, for hardly had the door closed behind him when Matthews put a note into his hand.

"If you please, sir, a young lady called about an hour ago, and was in a sad way when I told her you were out. But I said as how you'd surely soon be back to dinner, and I asked her to wait; but she said, 'Oh! no, she couldn't;' and then she wrote this, and begged me to give it you at once. And I'm sure she was in great trouble, for her hand trembled so that she could hardly hold the pen."

Long before Matthews had got through his lengthy explanation, abounding in unnecessary semicolons and full-stops, the doctor had torn open and read the note, which contained but half-a-dozen words imploring an early visit, and was signed Ruth Edgestone.

"Stop the carriage. A matter of life and death," he explained, turning to Grace. "Of course your mistress will not wait dinner for me."

This latter injunction was a mere form. Never would it have occurred to Winifred to wait dinner for her husband; though, had she been told to do so, she would have submitted without a word. This the doctor knew, and it was with a heart all the lighter for knowing that he should in this case, as in every other, be the only sufferer, that he repeated the excuse for thus slighting the already much-injured salmon. "A case of life and death, Grace."

"It'll be a case of the latter, sure enough," she muttered irefully, "if he goes on in this way; no rest, no food, no care for himself, and no one else to care for him."

Meanwhile the doctor, thus unexpectedly done out of his dinner, sank back in the carriage with a sigh half weariness, half disappointment; and, drawing the *Times* from his pocket, exchanged salmon for politics.

"I think this must be it, sir," said the coachman, as they drew up at last before a mean, unpretending row

of houses lying somewhere between Kensington and Hammersmith. "What number did you say, sir?"

"Number three."

The coachman scratched his head. Most of the houses were in the hands of painters and white-washers, and the numbers left here and there on the garden-gates had been almost effaced by time, damp, and the ruthless pocket-knives of destruction-loving errand-boys. A stray dog or two quarrelling in the road, a stray cat peering through the garden-rails, seemed the only living things in the place. The coachman was in despair; but the doctor's quick eye had caught sight of a muffled knocker, and almost at the same moment a very diminutive maid-servant appeared on the threshold, beckoning frantically with hand and apron.

"Does Miss Edgestone live here?" Before the girl could answer, a young lady came swiftly, but noiselessly, down the stairs. Arrived at the foot, she stopped short, and, shading her eyes with her hand, as if the full daylight glare streaming in through the still-open door were painful to her, said, in a quick under-breath, "Will you come up?" Then she turned and retraced her steps, flying rather than moving along the passage and up the stairs, only once pausing to see that her companion followed, though at a provokingly slow, leisurely pace.

To James Cameron, who possessed, in a remarkable degree, the power of concentrating his mind exclusively upon any matter he had in hand, first impressions were peculiarly vivid, and from them he drew conclusions that after-experience generally proved correct.

Now, as he followed the slight figure flitting before him like a shadow, he noticed many things that gave him a pretty clear insight into the state of affairs—pecuniary affairs at least—at No. 3, Elysium Terrace; the diminutive proportions of the servant—for the less the age and the lower the stature, the lower of course the wages; the shabby stair-carpets, ending abruptly at the drawing-room floor, their neat darns and artistic patches adding to their forlorn appearance in so hopeless a

degree that the clean, well-scoured boards that followed were a real relief to the eye; and the damp that, having penetrated in many places, had left dark, uncomfortable-looking stains on wall and ceiling; for repairs are expensive things, and landlords, alas! are too often deaf to the cry of the poor destitute whose rent does not come in as regularly as it might.

The sick-room bore the same unmistakable signs of poverty, as unmistakably made the best of. Though the only carpet of which it could boast was a narrow strip before each of the two little white beds, it was of a gay pattern, and the boards, like those of the stairs, were as clean as scrubbing could make them. The washhand-stand, it is true, was lamentably devoid of paint, and the jug and basin about as ill-matched a couple as fate ever united and Sir C. Cresswell put asunder (for those Lili-putian handmaidens make short work of crockery.) The well-darned dimity window-curtains, too, were rather more scanty than is consistent with elegance; but they were fresh, and neatly, even tastefully, drawn back with blue bands and rosettes.

All this the doctor took in at a glance; then the sick girl entirely engrossed his attention. He saw at once that the case was a very critical one, which had been altogether misunderstood and wrongly treated. She was in a high fever, the crisis of which might be expected in a few hours. She lay on her back, her shorn head tightly bandaged, and rolling incessantly from side to side; her face swollen and discoloured; her eyes fixed and distended. From time to time there was a low gurgling sound in her throat, but the parched lips refused to utter any articulate sound. As he bent over her, felt her pulse, passed his hand lightly over the burning skin, and asked the few necessary questions, Ruth stood beside him watching him with an agonised intentness pitiful to see,—watching his every look, as if to read therein a fiat of life or death. Outwardly so calm, speaking in a voice as clear and steady as if only answering an ordinary question, he could yet hear her breath coming in

quick, short gasps, while her whole frame seemed inwardly to shiver and tremble at the forced restraint she had imposed upon herself.

A remarkably composed, strong-minded young lady any casual observer would have deemed her; but James Cameron judged very differently.

"Who nurses her besides yourself?" he asked, at last.

"No one; we are alone in the world."

"Sisters?"

"Yes; orphan sisters."

"Orphan sisters!" the doctor repeated, abstractedly; then for the first time he turned and looked at her, and something in her face at once arrested his attention. Yet there was little in Ruth Edgestone to awaken any particular interest; a very ordinary girl, people said, and not without reason. Neither tall nor short, fair nor dark, ugly nor pretty, though she might, perhaps, have been moderately the latter had fate dealt more kindly by her. But the lines that come from premature care and anxiety,—from the petty worries and responsibilities of daily life, and the poor and too often degrading shifts to which genteel poverty is subject,—are certainly not becoming to the face of the young.

Every age has its peculiar charm: that of youth is its freshness, its buoyancy, its gay lightheartedness, beautiful as the rippling sunlight over a spring landscape; those who have to live struggle and suffer, cease to be young, and therefore lose the attributes of youth. Miss Edgestone's face was as quiet and settled in its expression as if she had seen forty, instead of twenty summers; it told you, plainly enough, that she had long ago formed her opinion of life, its joys and sorrows, duties and obligations. Many, at first sight, pronounced her cold, dull, and insipid; altogether wanting in the quick warmth of feeling, the gushing enthusiasm and delicate susceptibilities—those charming characteristics of women. But the daily wear and tear of this our work-a-day world, its rude pushings and joltings, and its ignominious encounters

with rough creditors and yet rougher debtors, have little in common with poetry and sentiment.

Ruth Edgestone was an earnest, deep-thinking, hard-working woman, whose whole bearing, voice, manner, and dress were in strict accordance with the character she had adopted and consistently carried out. Everything about her was steadfast and subdued, even to the colour, a pale decided brown, of her simply braided hair, and eyes,—even to the slight cast that at times so intensified the expression of the latter that she seemed, instead of watching the outward course of events, to be searching far down into her own heart for counsel, help, and hope.

The doctor read her character, part of it, at least, at a glance, and he spoke to her as to a brave, good woman, hopefully but truthfully; and listening to him with her grave eyes fixed on his, she felt that he was dealing openly by her, and so a mutual sympathy sprang up between them.

As he turned to leave the room, having first, as far as possible, remedied the mischief that had been already done, Ruth nerved herself to ask the fatal question that had so long trembled on her lip, but could never get beyond.

“Is there any hope?”

Quietly though she spoke, he well knew what those few words had cost her. “Ask me to-morrow,” was his only answer.

She turned very pale, and, hastily stooping over the bed, laid her hand upon that of her sister with a look of such deep, unutterable love, that the strong man shuddered to think of what that night’s work might be: end as it might, the struggle would, he knew, be a fearful one.

“I shall return in a couple of hours,” he said. “I apprehend no change within that time, but you must not be alone. My old housekeeper is an invaluable nurse and an excellent assistant; you must allow me to send her here to share the night’s watch with you, at least.”

She thanked him, though hardly seeming to realise the meaning of his words; then softly closing the door behind him, she returned to her post at the bedside, bent over the tossing, moaning form, kissed with reverent, lingering tenderness, as if for the last time, the vacant, bloodshot eyes, the swollen lips, the throbbing temples, and, kneeling down, took one of the wasted, burning hands into her cool palm, and, bowing her face down upon it, prayed for strength to endure unto the end. The prayer over, she did not at once rise, but knelt on, trying to collect her thoughts—to commune with her own heart and be still; but she could not think, she could only feel—feel with an intensity that thrilled her whole frame even to agony. She tried to hope, to recall the holy lessons of faith that experience had taught her. She thought of the sealed tomb where Jesus had wept; of the sisters whose faith had been stronger even than death. But what was their sorrow to hers? Two at least were left, one to comfort the other; while she and Miriam were alone in the world. Even the mother at the cross had a new son and a new home; but with Miriam she lost everything. “My last! my all!” she murmured, in an abandonment of despair too great to be altogether restrained. “My all! my all!” and, burying her face in the counterpane, she repeated her prayer for strength to endure unto the end. Then she rose and went about her work; and Grace Ingles, arriving soon afterwards, wondered at her almost superhuman courage and fortitude.

The night’s struggle between life and death was, as the doctor had foreseen, a fearful one: he, Grace, and Ruth watched it out together. Again and again, pitying the sister’s pale face and long watchings, he entreated her to lie down, if only for a couple of hours; he even tried upon her the force of one of his frowning commands, that few ever dared to disobey. But such love as Ruth’s is strong to bear and brave all; and she met both command and entreaty with the quiet, steadfast smile, against which there was no appeal.

James Cameron admired her gentle firmness; he admired, too, the still, noiseless way in which she moved about, doing whatever was to be done, never in the way and yet never out of it. If he wanted her she was at his side, guessing his wishes and obeying his orders with a promptitude and exactness he had seldom seen equalled by a first-rate nurse. Not once through all that night of agony did she lose her self-possession, and yet the sufferings of the poor fever-stricken patient were terrible to behold. It was only in the grey early dawn, whose deep silence had been broken by the wild, unhallowed ravings of delirium, that Miriam, exhausted, sank at last into a heavy, breathless stupor, and there was a momentary lull, the dim light of the shaded lamp falling on the three haggard, anxious faces watching and waiting for the end. But the fever-haunted brain could not rest for long, and she was soon talking again, not wildly as before, but sadly, brokenly, the scalding tears, that no loving hand had power to wipe away, rolling slowly down her cheeks.

"O! Ruth, I can't teach them any more—I can't, my head aches so dreadfully; and the figures won't stay, they move up and down, and I can't get the sum to come right." Then she wandered off into a dreary labyrinth of figures, beginning over and over again with painful persistency, calling out every now and then for Ruth with a wailing cry. And to every fresh appeal Ruth responded by fresh caresses and soothing, tender words, uttered in a voice so calm and steady that even the doctor marvelled at her self-control. Once only, happening to catch her eye, he thought he saw her lip pale and quiver, but so slightly that it might only have been fancy after all.

The crisis came and passed, and Miriam still lived; but when the doctor and Grace left early in the morning, life hung by so slight a thread that they half feared all would be over before they returned.

Ruth asked no questions this time, and the doctor was glad of it. He left her sitting by the bed, and so he found her on his return some hours afterwards; but

an important change had meanwhile taken place in the patient, who lay in a deep but quiet sleep.

Ruth, intently watching his face, saw him smile, and, stealing round to his side, was about to repeat the question he had refused to answer the day before; but he put his finger to his lip and beckoned her from the room. On the landing he paused and stood for some moments, lost in apparently anxious thought; then he asked for pen and paper to write a prescription.

"Will you come downstairs?"

He followed her down, and they entered a room that curtainless and carpetless, with wooden benches ranged along the wall, and maps everywhere covering it, with slates; copy-books, and dog's-eared school books still lying on the table, told its own tale, and that of the orphan sisters. Dr. Cameron looked from them to his companion's face, and its steady, subdued expression was explained. Hard work in the past, sickness and desertion in the present, and what in the future?

He wrote the prescription, but as she eagerly held out her hand for it he drew back. "No, no! I must have something in exchange. You must promise me that when Grace returns you will lie down for some hours."

"Miriam will miss me when she awakes."

"But she won't awake; indeed there's every probability of her sleeping for the next twelve hours; and our great object must be to keep her asleep."

"How glad I am I did not awake her then," said Ruth, as if speaking to herself; "but she lay so still and white, with such a strange, awful look on her face, that I sometimes thought I must cry out and awake her, only to make sure that she was not—dead." The last word was almost inaudible.

"A most fatal impulse, that, if carried out, might have lost me my patient, whereas now——"

"You see a hope of—of saving her!"

"Indeed I do; with God's help, a sure and certain hope."

"Oh, thank God! thank God!"

So the hope for which Ruth had prayed and sickened, and of which she had well nigh despaired, had come at last! She tried to be calm, to bear the sudden joy as she had borne the agony of suspense; but, worn out with watchings and anxiety, she could no longer be brave. A cold shiver ran through her frame, and she turned so white that Dr. Cameron, fearing she might fall, involuntarily held out his hand. She thanked him with a faint smile, and it was touching to see how hard, even amid bodily weakness and suffering, she struggled for composure, trying to speak, to answer his anxious look, to stand steadfast and unmoved before him; but it would not do, the overtaxed strength gave way hopelessly and entirely, and, sinking into a chair, she flung her arms over the table down among the slates and dogs'-eared books, and, burying her face in her hands, burst into an agony of tears.

Had they been tears of sorrow, James Cameron would not have left her without at least an attempt at comfort; but he knew that it was only the overflowing of the full heart, and so, after bending on her one of the deep, almost tender looks that God saw so much oftener in his eyes than man, he said, gently, "Remember your promise;" and, laying his hand one moment on the bowed head as if in blessing, left her alone.

He had many visits to pay before dinner, but it is strange how persistently Ruth Edgestone's face haunted him wherever he went, even in the fairy boudoir of the Duchess of D——, whose daughter, one of the acknowledged belles of the season, having imprudently done too much, viz., attended two balls, a réunion, and a concert in the course of one night, had somewhat impaired the natural brilliancy of her complexion, to restore which the first medical aid of the day must of course be called in. For Lady Jane had rivals, and pale cheeks might be set down to disappointment in love, mortification, or envy. A very pretty picture she made in her elegant *négligé* and graceful surroundings, and many would have envied James Cameron the familiar clasp of the slim, jewelled

hand; but he was little better than a rude barbarian after all, and to him a picture far more interesting was that bare, carpetless room, with the glaring noonday sun streaming in through the curtainless window, and pouring its flood of unshadowed light upon the homely, solitary figure, with its clasped hands and low-bowed head. As he entered his own drawing-room, where Winifred, bright and pretty in her rich soft silks, sat awaiting dinner, her hands, as usual, folded in her lap, doing nothing, looking at nothing, and apparently thinking of nothing, the pitying thought of Ruth Edgestone haunted him still.

Winifred, glad to break the silence that so often oppressed her when alone, was soon giving her husband the résumé of the day's news, but especially of the day's troubles, which consisted of a scratched finger, a muslin flounce torn by Tip's clumsy paw, and the prolonged visit of a boring acquaintance; and as he listened to her, with a half-amused, half-mocking smile playing around the corners of his lips, and as he watched her face, with its smooth brow unlined by a care, and the eyes undimmed by a thought, he could not help contrasting her lot with that of the young school-mistress. And yet she too had been left an orphan, and a thousand times more to be pitied than Ruth Edgestone, because less good and brave and strong; and then he fell to speculating upon what her fate might have been had he never claimed her—his darling, his child-wife—so young, so helpless, so endeared to him by the very weakness that would have made it impossible for her to stand alone.

A matter-of-fact man, living a matter-of-fact life, it was seldom that James Cameron indulged in any such thoughts as these; but there are times and circumstances that force upon us the reality of our own feelings.

Winifred little guessed what was passing in her husband's mine, as little as he guessed what was passing in hers as, having at last relapsed into silence, she sat with downcast eyes and a soft pensive look on her face, idly toying with the wedding-ring that seemed almost too heavy for the wee finger it encircled. The doctor drew

a chair to his wife's side, and, sitting down, imprisoned in his the little hand that bore the magic circlet. Though by no means a caressing husband, it gave him pleasure to hold that little hand in his, and she had such a pretty way of yielding it to him, as though it were indeed his by right to hold or release as he thought fit.

"Do you know what I have been thinking of, Winifred?"

"No."

"I have been thinking what a sad thing it is for a woman to stand alone in the world,—to have no one stronger than herself on whom she can lean in the hour of trial or of sorrow."

"Do you mean old maids?"

"Old or young, they are equally to be pitied. A woman however brave and independent, cannot be always strong; and how the weak and the timid get on at all, God only knows. You, too, were alone once, my darling, and this thought it is that makes my heart ache for the poor and the friendless whenever I meet them. There's nothing like love for awakening sympathy, and softening and humanising the heart. There, see what you've done; and now you must complete your work, and altogether change your rough bear of a husband into a mild philanthropist."

"Oh! by-the-bye," interrupted Winifred, eagerly, "that reminds me of something I so much wished to ask you. Have you insured your life, James?"

Had the hand James Cameron held been a venomous reptile he could not have dropped it more suddenly; and as the flood of warm emotions, all the deeper for being so rarely stirred, rushed back upon his heart, his countenance darkened, and the stern look of inquiry he bent upon his wife's face would have been anything but a pleasant one to meet.

But Winifred, engrossed in her subject, noticed neither the involuntary movement, nor the dark look, and so continued, with her usual recklessness, "Mrs. Joyce has been here" (Mrs. Joyce was the wife of a rival doctor),

“and talked so much about it; she says it is of the last importance: *she* insisted upon Mr. Joyce insuring his life a week after marriage, and she said I should make a point of finding out whether you’d insured yours; for that it is a duty every man owes his wife, more especially a doctor, who runs such terrible risks that there’s no depending upon his life; and if anything *were* to happen, which would be very dreadful of course, it would at least be a comfort to know oneself entitled to the insurance-money; for so many medical men, she says, who pass for rich, have a fine practice, and live in style, die and leave their widows penniless.”

All this was said in a tone as soft, and with a face as innocently unconscious of offence as if she had been giving utterance to the tenderest and most wifely sentiments, while every word burnt into the loyal heart that had so unhesitatingly taken her to itself, and still cherished her so reverently in spite of all. Cold, selfish calculation in one we love is at all times revolting; but it was especially so to such a nature as James Cameron’s. That he, whose proud reserve had raised him so far above the petty curiosity of his neighbours, should have been made the subject of a woman’s vulgar gossip, his private affairs openly discussed, and his actions as a man of honour criticized, stung him to the quick; but towards the wife who could not only allow such a discussion, but repeat it, he felt no anger, only an uncontrollable feeling of aversion, that made him rise abruptly and walk to a distant window.

Fortunately for Winifred, she did not repeat her question. Quite satisfied now that she had had her say, she relapsed into silence; for, acting entirely without thought, her mind was incapable for remaining long fixed upon any particular idea. This unconscious silence softened her husband more than the most vehement protest would have done; and, only too ready to make excuses for her wherever he could, he never somehow judged her as he would have done any other woman. Was she not after all a mere thoughtless child, repeating by heart the lesson

that had been taught her, hardly, perhaps, understanding the meaning of the words she used? If so, it would be cruel to resent them on her. Anyhow had he not sworn to himself to be indulgent to her faults, *whatever* they might be? Poor child! He turned and looked at her, and something in her face, her attitude, drew him insensibly towards her. His brow relaxed its sternness, and, though she seemed hardly to expect an answer, he gave her one.

“Your husband’s past care for you, Winifred, is the best assurance he can offer for the future. Whether my life is insured or no, your welfare is; of that you may be sure. The woman to whom James Cameron gave his name will never be penniless, either as his wife or his widow; and should anything happen to me, I can at least promise you the *comfort* you desire.”

Something hard and strange in the voice, that he had found it impossible altogether to control, startled Winifred, and made her look up hastily into her husband’s face, but his smile reassured her.

CHAPTER XIV.

MIRIAM recovered, but slowly; weakened by the violence of the fever, and of the remedies employed, it was so long before her naturally good constitution rallied, and life and death trembled so long in the balance, that many another doctor would have despaired of saving her. But James Cameron’s faith in himself was wonderful; and so was Ruth’s faith in him. From the moment he had held out to her a hope, she had rested in it with a simple but unshaken trust. Come when he might, he found her bright, calm, and ready. However unfavourable his report might be—and he told her the exact truth, disguising nothing from her,—she remained calm, bright, and steadfast still, betraying neither fear nor anxiety; only, perhaps, her low voice grew lower—her soft tread

softer; she watched more, and rested less. As a nurse she was perfect, obeying his orders with a punctuality and exactness that sometimes made him smile. The only thing of which he ever complained was that his patient was spoilt—an accusation that made both the sisters laugh.

As to what concerned herself, however, he found her far less amenable to orders; her invariable excuse for refusing fresh air and exercise being the one she had before made use of—"Miriam would miss me." But here Grace came in as valuable assistant, effecting by craft what could never have been effected by open command or entreaty. Once it was Miriam, who, at her instigation, wound her thin arms about Ruth's neck, and begged her, for her sake, to go to bed, as it made her so nervous to see her up that it quite prevented her sleeping. Another time it was a prescription that could only properly be made up at a certain chemist's, between whose shop and Elysium Terrace lay half-an-hour's walk. So fertile, indeed, was Grace in expedients, that she generally got her own way, and she and her master between them managed to keep up the strength of the one, and get up the strength of the other.

One sultry afternoon in June the two sisters were alone together. Miriam, who was now dragging through all the weary stages of convalescence, sat at the parlour window, with a book in her hand; but, too weak and listless to hold it up, she had let both book and hand drop into her lap, whilst with half-closed eyes she watched the opposite houses, in the faint hope of seeing something stirring—some sign of active life to relieve the dead heat and silence of the hour.

Ruth, seated at another table, was busy casting up and comparing the quarterly bills, that weighed more heavily upon her heart than did the ruin of a world upon the conscience of a Bonaparte. From time to time she would pause in her work to glance towards Miriam; but as she sat so still, she hoped that she had at last fallen asleep, and, exchanging her pen for a pencil, had just replunged

into her calculations, when startled by a faint sigh. Miriam was not asleep, then. She moved her chair a little, so as to get a better view of the invalid's face. No, she was not asleep—only dreaming, with her eyes fixed upon a little plant, the gift of some tender-hearted scholar, that stood beside her on the window-sill.

"Are you tired, dear?"

"No; why should you think so?"

"Because you sighed."

"Did I? Oh, no, I'm not tired; only I was just wondering what the summer looks like in the country. See, dear, my poor plant has only one flower—one pale, sickly little flower, and in the lanes and hedges there are thousands to be had for the gathering. And how cool and fresh the air must be! Do you remember how much we always enjoyed our summer trip when poor papa was alive, and how soon we recovered from the scarlet fever when he took us to the sea-side? It's all very well for the doctor to say that I'm better; I get weaker and weaker every day; the hot, stifling air suffocates me. Don't you think we could manage to get away just for a week, only for *one* week, Ruth dear, before the school opens?"

It was now Ruth's turn to sigh. It was more than a week since the doctor had advised a change, and she had ever since been tormenting herself to find out ways and means.

"Perhaps the landlord would wait," suggested Miriam.

"The landlord! oh no. He'd only make it an excuse for turning us out. He knows that he could get a much higher rent; he told me so himself, and he only keeps us on condition that we pay in the money regularly, and don't insist on repairs."

"Then the butcher, or grocer, or baker," persisted Miriam.

"To the grocer I can't pay anything, as it is. I can only give him a bill for September; and as for the baker and butcher——"

Ruth paused, arrested by a sudden thought. After

all, might not one of the two be really induced to wait, if the case were put clearly before him? Were they not men with human hearts and sympathies, to which she might appeal? The idea of making such an appeal was anything but a pleasant one; and as far as she herself was concerned, she would have remained in London to the end of her life rather than make it. But Miriam, who so longed for a change, what sacrifice was too great to be made for *her*? She would try. But which should it be—butcher or baker? The latter was a smooth, civil-spoken man—remarkably civil indeed to his customers. But one day, when a poor blind beggar, led by a little child, had entered the shop, he had turned them out with cruel taunts and threats. They were only beggars, it is true; but he was old and blind, and the child that led him—so *very* little! No; she would not appeal to that man's heart; it would be sacrilege to speak of sister Miriam to *him*. There only, then, remained the butcher—a rude, rough man, with a giant's frame, a loud voice, and a coarse, even brutal manner; and yet one day, when a half-starved dog sneaked into the shop, and looked up into his face with wistful, hungry eyes, he not only threw it the scrap of meat, but a pitying word and look into the bargain. The heart that could feel for the outcast dog would feel for the sick, friendless orphan. She would go to him, tell him all—even her fears for the next quarter's receipts, which must prevent her making any rash promises,—and ask him to wait. Perhaps he would answer her as he had done once before, that those who could not pay for meat had better not eat it; or, having yielded the point, he would wax loud and offensive—perhaps slap her on the back, or chuckle her under the chin, taking out the interest of his money in familiarity. Poor Ruth! she had had many such experiences. Poverty is a sad leveller, and some natures shrink with more sensitive pain from such hand-to-hand encounters with the coarse and brutal. “Five pounds, sixteen, and twopence-halfpenny!—how small a sum to require so great a sacrifice!” Ruth glanced from

it to Miriam's face—that face over which had so lately lain the shadow of the tomb, and at which she could never even now look without an inward shudder, to think how the shadow might have darkened over it, and hidden it away out of her sight for ever. She rose; her resolution was formed: she would go at once and get it over; the shop was always less full of an afternoon. She gave a nervous little cough, to steady her voice, and said—

“I must go out now, dear, but not for long. I shall soon be back. Shall I move you to the sofa before I go?”

“Oh, no. If there is life or air to be found anywhere, it's at the window. But you won't be long away, will you?”

“An hour, at the most.”

In two minutes Ruth was cloaked and bonneted, and very neatly too, though without the aid of a glass.

Miriam watched her out, and down the street, acknowledging by a feeble smile the nods and kisses she threw back at her, until quite out of sight. This diversion over, she sank back with a weary sigh. What would happen next? Nothing, for at least five minutes, which appeared to her an age. Then came the distant sound of carriage wheels, seldom heard in that shabby little terrace. Would they pass on, or would they turn the corner? Miriam grew almost feverishly nervous and expectant; not that she dreamt of a visitor for herself, but she wanted to be roused from the lethargy that oppressed her, and she had more than once lately found amusement in watching a certain carriage stop before an opposite house, to which had lately come a certain mysterious lady, very young and pretty, who appeared at the window, at 10 A.M., in curl papers and the untidiest of *négligés* and in the evening in silks, laces, and jewellery, whose splendour excited the envy of every jewellery-loving heart in the neighbourhood. And in the evening it generally was that the carriage, with its thorough-bred greys and plain-liveried, decorous-looking servants, would

stop before the house, and from it would alight a decidedly elderly gentleman, who might so well have been the pretty lady's grandfather, and who always sneaked into the house in a shamefaced, guilty sort of way, as though he'd no mortal right to be there. Had he come to pay one of his mysterious visits? The carriage turned the corner, rolled along the terrace, and stopped at No. 3. The unexpected visitor was Dr. Cameron.

Though no especial favourite of Miriam, who could not forgive his being so perfectly unconscious of her charms,—for when in health she was a very pretty girl, and knew it,—she was just now too grateful for company of any sort not to welcome her visitor warmly. He sat down, felt her pulse, asked for Ruth, admired the roses in the garden, wrote a prescription, then rose to leave.

"And you haven't even asked me how I feel," said Miriam, vexed and pouting; for though she stood somewhat in awe of the great grim man, she was too much of a spoilt child not to betray vexation.

"Because I know it without asking."

"Then tell me all I feel, and I'll frankly confess if you're right."

"You feel weak and tired; dull, depressed, and altogether out of sorts; very much inclined to quarrel with your best friends, and longing for all sorts of impossible things. Am I right?"

"Yes; but how did you guess it?" asked Miriam opening very wide the large hazel eyes.

"Perhaps because, like many of my countrymen, I've the gift of second sight; or perhaps because something in your voice, face, and attitude betrayed you."

"That's what Ruth always says, that my face is a window, through which you can see everything that's passing below; but my longing (for I have only one) isn't so very unreasonable after all—it's only for a breath of country air; but, oh, you can't think how I long for that."

"Poor child!" The doctor's sympathy was aroused,

and he resumed his seat. "Miss Edgestone told me you had not left London for three years."

"No, not since poor papa's death. But I never cared to before; I always thought the midsummer holidays the happiest time of the year. Of an evening we worked and read in the Kensington Gardens. When we wanted a change, we went for a day to Kew, Richmond, or the Crystal Palace; and sometimes, when we'd a little money over, Ruth would take me to the Christy Minstrels, or the Colosseum, or Madame Tussaud's, or any other shilling amusement I might choose. I enjoyed it all very much then; but now I dream of nothing, day and night, but a complete change, either to the country or the sea-side, which Ruth says is impossible. But you could never guess what I was thinking of when you entered."

"Then I needn't try; need I?"

Miriam laughed and enlightened him. "I was thinking of the hundred pounds that papa once lent a friend to take him out to America, and which he never returned; it was many years ago, but whenever I want something very much I remember it, and lay it out, just as if I had it. Before leaving England, he gave papa his lawyer's address, promising to put the money into his hands within the year; but Mr. Felton has not heard of him since, any more than we have."

"Felton!" repeated the doctor. That was the name of his own lawyer and confidential friend.

"But, oh!" said Miriam in a distressed tone, suddenly recollecting herself, "I shouldn't have said all this: what would Ruth say if she knew it? She says that we should never discuss our private concerns, but particularly our money troubles, with anyone; and she especially forbade my mentioning them to *you*. I'm so sorry: I quite forgot. But you won't tell her, will you? She's so good that I can't bear to pain her."

He gave the desired promise; then rising once more, he shook hands and left her, without a word of sympathy, without even a message for Ruth.

Meanwhile Miss Edgestone, true to her resolution, had

repaired to Mr. Morrison's shop; but as she approached it her heart sank, her step waxed slower and heavier, and, its threshold gained, her courage failed her altogether; it was so hard to be obliged to ask a favour. Several times she passed and repassed, retreating precipitately whenever anyone came forward as if intending to address her. At last, after many an ineffectual struggle with herself, each of which made her feel more weary and sick at heart, she thought she would wait until the shop was a little cleared of its unusual influx of customers. For this purpose she stationed herself at the bookseller's next door, keeping one eye on the photographs therein displayed, but the other ever on the dreaded portal. "If only," she thought, "Mr. Morrison, big and greasy, would appear at it!" It would be so much easier to go up to him at once and proffer her request. But he did not appear, and the shop did not empty; and, oh dear! Miriam would be tired of waiting, and would be wanting her tea. Ruth made one step forward, and two backward; looked up the street, and down it; recalled Miriam's pale, wistful face; then, with a quickly beating heart, entered the shop—to find that Mr. Morrison was miles away in the country, and only expected home late that night.

"Had Miss Edgestone any orders?"

No; but she must see Mr. Morrison. She would call again next day. The delay, trifling as it may appear, was a cruel blow to poor Ruth. Suspense is of all things the most trying; and her heart sank at the thought of the coming day. Poor, foolish, over-sensitive Ruth!

Hurrying home, and clearing her face of every shade of vexation in the passage, before entering the parlour, she went in with her usual cheerful briskness. Miriam still sat in the window, and very cross and dull she looked. Ruth, deeply penitent for having left her so long alone, entered into a full account of her walk—the friends she had met, the inquiries that had been made after the invalid, the visits that had been promised, &c.;

but Miriam would not brighten, and presently she interrupted her with the abrupt remark—

“Dr. Cameron has been here.”

“Oh! I’m so glad. How did he find you looking?”

“He didn’t say, and what’s more, he didn’t care. He asked nothing, prescribed nothing, and sat half the time lost in a reverie. Heaven only knows of what he was thinking; not of me, certainly. It’s little those fine doctors care for poor people like us, who can’t even pay them their fees.”

Miriam was only venting her ill-humor in idle words; but they were more than Ruth could bear, and she now broke in, in a voice so strange, sharp, and ringing, that Miriam looked up in astonishment—

“For shame, Miriam! How can you?—how dare you speak like that of one to whom we owe your very life? If it hadn’t been for him—oh, Miriam! you know it—you would have been dead, and I alone in the world without you. What other doctor would have watched by you as he did through all that dreadful night, when we thought every minute would be your last? Oh! I shall never forget it—never. How could he do more than he has done—coming day after day, though we live so far from town, and then refusing all remuneration so nobly, so generously, saying that ‘It’s not for the successful man, whose labours God alone has blessed, to sell for gold the life of the weak and struggling, who like him have to work, but in weakness, not in strength’? And this is our return for all!”

Ruth had spoken with a passion—a vehemence to which her usually quiet, self-contained nature was a stranger. For a moment she stood with heaving breast and kindling eye, her slight frame shaken and trembling with emotion; then, overcome by feelings whose force surprised even herself, and of which she was perhaps half ashamed, she sank into a chair, and buried her face in her hands.

Never before had Miriam seen her so moved—so excited, and the unusual outburst half frightened her. She

reproached herself for her ingratitude, pronounced the doctor the greatest of men and best of friends; then, as Ruth made no answer, she crept up to her side and fell to coaxing and kissing her, promising never again to be so wicked.

With a great effort Ruth mastered her emotion; but throughout the evening a close observer would have detected a certain lingering sadness in the smile and voice. Miriam, however, was no close observer, and, glad to have made it up with her sister, she allowed herself to be comfortably settled on the sofa, while Ruth busied herself with the tea, tempting the invalid's capricious appetite, now with a piece of toast made by herself at the kitchen fire, now with a slice of bread and butter, so artistically cut as to be quite a *chef d'oeuvre* of its kind. And, tea over, she drew a stool to the sofa, and indulged in the only idle hour she allowed herself during the day—the pleasant twilight chat that Miriam so enjoyed. And then it was she told her, for the first time, of the grand hope she had of giving her change of air for a week at least.

Miriam's cry of delight, and the sudden brightening of her whole face, were sufficient reward for every sacrifice the trip had or might cost her.

When the first excitement had a little subsided, they proceeded to discuss ways and means, time and place. The last, indeed, was the most important question of all; and Ruth's pressing anxiety now was to find something as near town as possible. After a moment's silent thought, she broke in upon Miriam's ecstasies with the somewhat startling query—

“I wonder if we could travel third class?”

Miriam burst out laughing. “Is it over this you have been so long pondering?”

“Well, dear, you see five pounds is so little for all I want to do with it. It's of no use your having change of air unless you can really profit by it; and everything's so expensive; and there are so many little comforts I should like to give you—a drive every day, for instance;

then you must take baths and plenty of nourishing food, and you must not discontinue the tonic with which Dr. Cameron has hitherto so liberally provided us, and——”

“Oh, I’m sure I shan’t want baths, or jellies, or medicines, or anything else, but plenty of shrimps and porter, and bread and butter.”

“But even shrimps are an expensive item—sixpence a plate. But I wonder if we *could* travel third class?”

“Could! why, of course we could; what is to prevent us—our gentility, or the babies, or the fat women who’d call us ‘love’ and ‘dear,’ and together with their baskets—fat women always have baskets—would take up all the room and air?”

“Oh, I shouldn’t mind the babies, or the fat women either,” said Ruth, in a thoughtful speculative tone; “but I’ve sometimes seen the third class carriages quite full of soldiers, who——”

“Would also call us ‘love’ and ‘dear,’” put in Miriam, with mischievous gravity; “but what of that? We should save our money, and have all the more to spend on shrimps.”

But Ruth shook her head. No; Miriam must not be subjected to any affront. Though poor, they were ladies born and bred. The idea of the third-class carriage was renounced, with an involuntary drawing up of the slight figure.

The next morning she again presented herself at Mr. Morrison’s shop, but this time there was no hesitation; she neither loitered about, nor examined photographs, but went boldly in, and straight up to the surly master, and, looking him in the face with grave, steadfast eyes, in which no one could have detected either timidity or nervous trepidation, told him all—her sister’s longing for change, their lack of means, her fears for the next quarter’s receipts; and then she asked him to wait. He consented, as she well knew he would, but in a very different manner to what she had expected—without insult, familiarity, or inquiry, but with a hearty sympathy

in her anxiety, and a sincere wish for the young lady's recovery. As to the money, he begged her, with rude earnestness, not to trouble herself about *that*. What was a five pound more or less to him in his business? Nothing—nothing at all! Then as Mrs. Morrison, wondering at the lengthened parley, came waddling up, brimful of curiosity, he merely told her that Miss Edgestone was going out of town to the sea-side, with the poor sick young lady, and had come to give him due notice of her departure; and, moreover, when the good woman, by way of expressing a particular interest in the invalid, appealed to him to say whether she hadn't told him, times out of number, how like the poor young thing was to their own Tommy, who died a year ago come August, and was buried in Brompton Cemetery, he, fearing that Miss Edgestone might hardly like the comparison, apologised for it by saying that it was just a way the missus had of taking to anyone, to find out a likeness to her poor dead lad.

The bereaved mother wiped her eyes, and, fresh customers coming in, she waddled off to attend to them, while Mr. Morrison accompanied Miss Edgestone to the door, half lifting from his head at parting the greasy cap, that would not, I verily believe, have been raised an inch had Milady Bolton, who honoured him with her custom, come in person to give her orders. For George Morrison was a sad Radical; though not after all such a very bad fellow.

With a light step and lighter heart, Ruth sped homeward, and her sharp brisk knock rang out, the harbinger of good news. So busy was she with her own pleasant thoughts, that she did not hear approaching footsteps, and actually started when a formidable-looking document, sealed, registered, and rendered doubly official by the large blue envelope, was thrust into her hand. What could it be? A lawyer's letter—a summons—a formal notice from the landlord, ejecting them or raising their rent? Nothing of what the world calls good luck ever visited No. 3, Elysium Terrace, and poor Ruth's heart

always sank and sickened at the sight of any official-looking missive.

She did not open it at once, for she had orders to give; and if anything were amiss, Jane, the round-eyed abigail, must not guess it, nor Miriam either. Bad news she always kept as much as possible to herself. So she stole softly past the parlour, and up to her own room. Very soon, however, she came flying down again, and, bursting into the parlour, flushed and breathless, awoke Miriam from the half-dose into which she had fallen.

"Oh, Miriam, dear!" she exclaimed, "just read this. I think I must be dreaming. It's so strange—so wonderful!"

Miriam read—

"MADAM,—I am requested by a client, whose name I am not at liberty to reveal, to remit you the sum of 50*l.*, in part payment of an old debt incurred many years ago. A line in the form of a receipt will greatly oblige,

"Your obedient Servant

"F. FELTON."

"Oh, Ruth!" was all that Miriam could find breath to say.

"It must be the gentleman who owed papa the hundred pounds; don't you think so?" said Ruth.

"Of course; who else could it be? And to think of our getting it after all. And the strangest thing is, that only yesterday——"

Miriam stopped short, colouring violently. She had been on the point of betraying herself, and letting out what she had said to Dr. Cameron. Fortunately she drew up in time, and substituted another version of the case.

"Only yesterday, I was thinking of all that money would have done for us."

"And will do for us now. Only think, darling, of all the comforts it will procure you."

"And shrimps and prawns *ad libitum*—eh, Ruth? We can afford even *prawns* now, can't we?"

"Fifty pounds!" repeated Ruth, as if hardly able even yet to realize the magnitude of the possession. "And it cost me so much to obtain five! Ah, well! never mind; I gained something else at the same time—something money can't buy. I gained a friend—a real friend, though only a butcher."

"*Only a butcher!* Why, isn't he the grandest, most mighty and powerful friend we could possibly possess?" said Miriam, laughing.

When the doctor, whom a note from Ruth had apprized of the unexpected stroke of good luck that had befallen the orphan sisters, came a few days later to pay his last visit, and give his last report, he was met by one smile at least as bright as any he had seen in his daily round. For the first time, looking at Miriam's sunny face, he noticed how pretty she was; and declared that the money that had wrought such a change could have been the gift of no ordinary mortal, but of some fairy god-mother.

Miriam, who, when well and happy, was a thorough little chatterbox, was sole spokeswoman on the occasion; and having expatiated upon the delights of shrimps, sea-breezes, and the Esplanade band, next proceeded to give the doctor a full and particular account of poor Ruth's interview with the butcher. The more it amused him, the more it distressed the heroine, who, trying in vain to catch her sister's eye, caught that of the doctor instead, fixed on her with a look that made the blood rush in a crimson flood to her very temples. Though not at all given to blushing, there was something in the intent look of those grey eyes that affected her strangely; they seemed to read into her very heart, so that she sometimes feared that she would soon have no secret left in it at all. Soon! why was not this his last visit? A kind word, a pressure of the hand, and he would have passed from their lives perhaps for ever. The parting lay heavy at her heart, and made her more

silent and retiring than usual; but when he left, though he had already bidden her good-by, she followed him downstairs and out into the little garden.

He did not appear to notice her, and she feared that he would drive off, as he had often done before, without seeing her, or allowing her a last word. But when they reached the gate he turned round with a quiet smile, that told of his having been all along aware of her presence.

"You have something on your mind; what is it?" he said, laying his strong hand authoritatively on her shoulder.

"I! what makes you think so?" she asked, taken aback, and colouring again deeply; for she knew that he was looking at her.

"I don't *think*, I *know*. You have something on your mind; what is it?"

"Must I tell you?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is a debt that I am not allowed to pay, and which therefore weighs all the heavier on my heart."

She knew that he had guessed her meaning, for he hastily withdrew his hand. Was he very angry? She dared not raise her eyes until she had had her say.

"I know that such a debt as we owe you could never be cancelled. Even my life I should deem but a poor return for that of Miriam; but if you would at least let me prove how dear that life is to me, now that we are so rich, and—it would give me courage to apply to you another time; for oh! I can't bear to think that you are going away, and that we shall perhaps never see you again." Ruth's voice, sinking lower and lower, was at last quite inaudible; but she drew from her pocket a sealed envelope, and looked entreatingly into the stern dark face, that looked sterner and darker than she had ever seen it before.

"Put that back into your pocket," he said in a rough tone of command. "I thought you would have understood me better than to offer it me a second time."

Under God I have saved your sister's life, and you say truly that money could not cancel such a debt. Never therefore broach the subject again: if you do, I give you up, you and your sister; but if you humour me in this one respect, I constitute myself henceforth not only your physician, but your friend, to be applied to upon every occasion—the oftener the better. What do you say? Will you take me as your friend?"

She did not answer, but going to a white rose bush that grew close under the parlour window, she gathered the fairest flower upon it. "It is a bush specially consecrated to the dead," she said softly, as she held it out to the grim-looking man, with a smile half timid, half appealing. "Every Sunday I gather the most beautiful rose for the grave of our father and mother; they lie together in Kensal Green."

"My sister lies there too." That was all he said, as he took the rose, and bent over it with a clouded brow. It was the first time he had ever spoken to a stranger of the dead sister whose name so seldom passed his lips. Ruth drew a long breath. Then he, too, had had a sister! The thought was as a new bond of sympathy between them, and seemed to draw him so much nearer to her; but she asked no question, expressed no sympathy, only on the next Sunday she gathered two white roses instead of one.

CHAPTER XV.

THE friendship James Cameron had offered Ruth Edgestone was not a mere idle profession; and the conviction he had that she would never take undue advantage of it, or apply to him except in the greatest emergency, made him all the more anxious to help her; but this her sensitive pride and independence of character rendered rather a difficult matter. Had she been a real object of charity, and had he wished to raise a sub-

scription for her, or get her into a charitable institution, he would at once have attained his object. For among his extensive connection he had lady friends of every age and condition, who would have been only too glad to oblige the fashionable doctor. But he was not one to share his confidence with ladies of every age and condition, and among all his acquaintance there was no one to whom he would have cared to speak of Ruth Edgestone except Mrs. Charlton Leigh, to whom, notwithstanding her little eccentricities, he always turned in any perplexity. It was to her care he had once thought of consigning Winifred Morgan, and it was of her he now thought in connection with the orphan sisters.

There was no hurry, however; he would wait until she sent for him, which, as he had not seen her for some time, would he well knew be before long. And accordingly he one day received an urgent summons, which he obeyed with more alacrity than usual. He found his old friend very elegant, languid, and full of tender little reproaches. "Why had he not come before?"

"Because he had not been sent for." No, of course not; she knew too well how valuable his time was to intrude upon it, nor would she have sent for him at all, had not the symptoms grown so alarming.

"Why, what have we now?" he said, settling himself in the great easy-chair that always went by his name. And this Mrs. Leigh hailed as a good omen, meaning a nice long visit; for when in a hurry he never would take that chair and make himself comfortable. "Why, what have we now? I have been puzzling my brains ever since I left home to guess what new malady you could possibly have discovered; for I certainly thought we had exhausted every complaint to which human flesh is heir, but you women have the most wonderful powers of invention."

"Nonsense," indignantly exclaimed the patient, whom the doctor's first words had roused, as they always did, from the assumed languor of imaginary sickness. "It's

nothing new; and I'm not the one to give way to idle fancies. No one has ever known, or ever can know, what I have suffered in silence."

"No, that would indeed, I think, be impossible," he answered drily.

"Ah well, you may laugh, and I know that you think it fancy and nonsense; but you'll be sorry later when your old friend's gone that you so misunderstood and maligned her. Doctor, believe me or not as you will, but I'm morally convinced that my liver is growing to my side. I always suspected it—always; but now I'm *sure* of it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, there can be no doubt of it. Mrs. S—— was here this morning, and was telling me of the death of her sister from that awful malady, and our symptoms were exactly the same. What! you don't believe it? Perhaps you'll next deny my having a liver at all."

"Alas! no; we've all livers, more's the pity. Our world indeed might be designated among the planets as the world of disordered livers, and hence arise half its crimes, sorrows, and sufferings. And yet they're somehow necessary to our existence—poor finite beings that we are! and it's a recognised thing that we couldn't do without them; for though writers have often portrayed heroes without conscience, mind, heart, or even—presuming upon the poetic licence accorded to them—without soul—whoever yet heard of a hero without liver?"

"Nonsense," again repeated Mrs. Leigh. But she laughed; and the doctor having gained his point—for the best preface to a request is a good laugh—changed the half mocking tone in which he had hitherto spoken, to one altogether grave and professional; and, giving her case his best attention, listened to, and accounted and prescribed for, all her symptoms. Then, as the conversation drifted on to more general topics, he told her the simple story of the young school-mistresses, and her sympathy was at once enlisted. "What could she do for them? Was there no way of helping them?"

Yes, he had thought of a way. Perhaps among her Indian connection she might hear of a child for whom the parents wanted a happy English home; and nowhere certainly could such a home be found for one of those poor forlorn little waifs as with Miss Edgestone.

"Edgestone!" Mrs. Leigh sprang from her chair pale and trembling. "Edgestone! impossible. What Edgestone?"

"Miss Ruth Edgestone," said the doctor, almost as much startled by so unlooked-for an outburst as she had been by the name. "Do you perhaps know them?"

"No, it's impossible—it can't be," she murmured, unheeding the question. "Orphans, friendless, and destitute. O God! it's impossible."

A light had broken in upon the doctor, who was inclined to echo the oft repeated word, impossible!

"Tell me all you know about them—all, all!" she said, turning almost fiercely upon her companion, who answered simply—

"I have little to add to what I have before said. They are orphans, and their names are Ruth and Miriam."

"Miriam," she gasped; but he continued as if unconscious of the interruption—

"Their father was a musician, I believe, but he died young. Of their mother I know nothing; they never spoke of her to me, except to mention casually that she lies in Kensal Green."

"So near! and yet I never saw her grave—I who was so fond and proud of her."

She seemed terribly shaken and agitated, and paced the room for some minutes in silence. Then stopping suddenly before him, she said abruptly, "Did you know of this before? and was it all a trick to entrap me into a reconciliation?"

"With whom?"

"With Ruth and Miriam Edgestone, my dead sister's orphan children."

"And your nieces," he added almost sternly. "No,

indeed. Had I known what I know now, you would have been the last to whom I should have applied; for though I have never known you refuse your help to the stranger, I have twice appealed to you in behalf of your orphan nieces in vain."

She did not answer, but continued her hurried walking up and down, the doctor's eyes from under their heavy brows watching her intently. Accustomed as he was to see and hear strange things, this was certainly one of the strangest. Unwittingly he had once more become the advocate of the repudiated nieces, but his advocacy was now at an end; the rest must be left to nature, and to her he accordingly left it, with a mind quite at ease as to the result. But the victory proved a far easier one than even he had expected, for the aunt's next words were—

"Give me their address; I'll go and see them at once."

"Impossible, they're at the seaside."

"Of course, people always are at the seaside, or somewhere out of the way, when you want them. When do they return?"

"They went for a month, and have been gone half that time. You have still, therefore, a fortnight to wait; but to hasten matters you might write to them."

"On no account!" she exclaimed in a horrified tone. "I wish to take them by surprise—to make myself known to them in person."

"As Joseph made himself known to his brethren," said the doctor slyly; for he knew how dearly his old friend loved any new kind of excitement, and how thoroughly to her taste would be the recognition-scene, with its tears and kisses, its explanations and exclamations.

"How can I compromise myself before I have seen them and judged for myself? But a fortnight! Why not have said a year at once. And to think of their being *protégées* of yours! I think you said they were pretty presentable girls—eh, doctor?"

"The one is pretty and presentable, and a good girl

enough no doubt; the other is more than pretty or presentable—she's an angel."

"Ah well, poor Miriam was an angel too, a perfect angel, but quite thrown away upon the horrid, low-born music-master; and such a match as she might have made! Oh, doctor, you can't think how I suffered; but it would be cruel, after so many years, to visit it upon *them*, poor things. They must have had a trying time of it; and I am not hard-hearted, I never was; and I must try and forget that they are his children, as I can't forget that they are *hers*. I wonder if either of them is like her. Well, I'm glad at least that one has her name."

About three weeks after this, as Dr. Cameron was waiting for his carriage at the corner of Grosvenor Square, he was somewhat startled at finding his arm suddenly and unceremoniously seized from behind, and turning, he saw Mrs. Charlton Leigh, who, flushed and breathless, exclaimed excitedly—

"Oh doctor, how glad I am to have met you! I have been so wanting to tell you all, but knew not how to get at you. I should actually have been obliged to get up a serious case, had I not fortunately caught sight of you in so providential a manner."

The doctor looked at his watch. "I can give you one turn round the square."

Mrs. Leigh launched forth into her subject without loss of time.

"Well, doctor, I've seen them, and the interview was most satisfactory. My opinion of course was just yours. How right you always are! The one is, as you say, an angel, the living image of her mother, and just her winning ways, voice, smile, and manner too, so like that my dead sister stood once more before me. The other, as you said, seems a good little girl enough, but too staid and reserved for so young a creature, and so like her father that it gave me quite a shock; just his cold way of saying things, so different from her sister. Poor child! I was really quite affected when she clung to me just as my own dear Miriam used to do, laughing and

crying, and telling me all about her illness, and how good you had been to them. I assure you she was quite eloquent on the subject." (Here Mrs. Leigh squeezed the doctor's hand affectionately.) "Not but what Ruth is quite as grateful no doubt, but I can't get the child to speak freely to me."

They had made the turn of the square, and the doctor had heard quite enough to render him thoroughly uncomfortable for the remainder of the evening. So, pretty, impetuous Miriam was the angel in the aunt's eyes, and his angel was only a good little girl. Well, so probably would have decided nineteen out of twenty. Still he felt annoyed at the turn affairs had taken, and a few days afterwards, having an hour to spare, he drove to Elysium Terrace.

He was shown as usual into the neat, quiet little drawing-room, and, almost before he had had time to close the door, Ruth stood before him. The flush of delighted surprise with which she welcomed him so brightened and lighted up her plain little face that his first exclamation was, "How well you look." But the excitement over, and the flush having died out of her cheek, he looked at her with less satisfaction, but more interest. Instinctively he felt that, anxious as he had been to help her, he had only made matters worse. She had been grieving, silently and secretly no doubt, but that didn't mend matters. Poor little Ruth! He felt an actual pang when she turned on him her meek, reverential eyes, and thanked him for all he had done for them. "For," she added, "aunt told us that it was only your kind mediation that had brought her here. And she is so good to us: she comes every day to fetch Miriam for a drive, and yesterday she took her to the theatre, and she has promised to take her to the opera too."

"Very kind and considerate of Mrs. Leigh, and meanwhile you are left alone."

"Oh, but she would be glad for me to go too—indeed she would; only, we can't both leave the house at once, and Miriam is always so dull when left alone."

"And you are never dull?"

Ruth hesitated, as there rose up before her the memory of many a lonely evening, that had seemed so strangely long and silent in its loneliness; and there were so many more of them to come. She knew that he was looking at her with the odd, intent look that had so often troubled her. Had he guessed of what she was thinking? Her eyes sank to the ground, but he remorselessly repeated his question—

"And you—do you never feel dull?"

"I have always so much to do, that I've little time left for dulness; and it makes me so happy to see Miriam quite her old self again, only much brighter and happier than she ever was; for she couldn't bear teaching, and I could never afford her any amusement. You can't think how well she is looking—so changed, so improved."

Dr. Cameron was not one to beat about the bush; he always came straight to the point, and he did so now.

"Miss Edgestone, in speaking of you to Mrs. Leigh, I had hoped to serve you; but as things have turned out, I think it would have been much better had neither of us meddled in the matter."

"Oh no, indeed," she eagerly interrupted, "you would not say so if you knew how it has all come in answer to my prayers. I always felt that the hard life of a schoolmistress did not suit Miriam; and she and aunt get on so well together—they took to each other from the first, and Aunt Emily says she is henceforth to look upon her as a mother, and she is to learn every fashionable accomplishment, and to be brought out into the world."

Ruth wound up with something that sounded very like a sigh; but when the doctor turned to look into her face, it was calm and smiling.

"I do not approve of your sister's conduct," he said in rather a hard tone.

Ruth looked as penitent and distressed as if the blame

had been addressed to her. "Oh, you mustn't think ill of her—it's unjust, cruel; she's so good, so yielding, so sweet-tempered. Aunt told me that you had called her an angel, and so indeed she is. Don't you remember how patient she was during her illness?"

"I remember how patient *you* were."

"Who could have been otherwise, she was so gentle, so obedient. You won't think ill of her, will you?"

Very earnest, very pleading, were Ruth's eyes and words; but the doctor in no way relented. He disapproved of the whole affair, and wished both himself and his old friend at the bottom of the sea for having thus destroyed the peace and harmony of that gentle life. His self-reproach was redoubled when he found that Mrs. Leigh proposed adopting Miriam, and taking her altogether from her sister.

"Why, it's the old story of the rich man and the ewe lamb," he exclaimed indignantly, "and I won't allow it; she either takes both or neither."

"But she offered me a home, and even pressed it upon me."

"Yes, in such a manner that you couldn't accept it."

"No, I could *not* accept it." She spoke gently, but firmly.

"And why not?"

"Because, though aunt Emily is so good and kind now, I can't forget that she once made poor papa unhappy. It was not long after the death of my mother, when he was quite broken-hearted, that she wrote him a letter. I was quite a little child, but I knew that the letter was from Aunt Emily, and as he read it, I saw him turn very pale, and as he folded it up, two great tears fell upon it; it was the only time I ever saw him cry. After his death I found the letter, and then I knew why he had never from that day mentioned her name again. I don't think he cared for what she said of *him*; but she also said that it was he who had caused my mother's early death, by taking her from wealth and luxury to poverty and privation; and this thought haunted

him to his dying day. I think he half believed that what she had said was true. No, I could not accept her hospitality, though I am very grateful to her for her kindness to Miriam."

She paused, then continued in a steadier voice, "I shall remain quietly here so as always to have a home for Miriam, should she ever want it. It's best so; best for us both."

What could Dr. Cameron answer to all this? What right had he to interfere in the matter? And after all, would Ruth in her aunt's house, neglected, and set aside for the prettier sister, be less to be pitied than Ruth at home, lonely and struggling, it is true, but free and independent? As for Miriam, it was of course the best thing that could have happened to her, and to Mrs. Leigh it would be like a second youth. No, there was no help for it; Ruth must be left alone—the one must be sacrificed for the many, as it ever has been, and ever will be unto the end of time.

"You won't in any way prevent it, will you?" said Ruth.

"You have not given me the right," he answered, almost sharply; "if I could, I would."

As she gave him her hand at parting, she looked up wistfully, very wistfully, into his dark face; but he was thoroughly put out, and his manner was rough and even hard. But he repented him of this when, as he was getting into his carriage, he caught sight of the lonely little figure still standing at the window, the face pressed to the glass, and the eyes, now that they were in repose, looking so sad—so very sad; and as he drove away he thought what a blundering fool he had been, and how impossible it seemed for him to do aught but evil to those he most wished to befriend. For reasons best known to himself, he had taken the orphan under his especial protection, and what had come of it all but sorrow? Was the old curse still working—the curse of the little child on her father's knee? He thought of her, of Lucy, of Winifred, whom out of pity he had taken

to himself, and now there was Ruth Edgestone, whose hard lot his interference had made yet harder; he covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud.

Ruth having watched the carriage out of sight, turned from the window and looked at the clock. Miriam might be expected home in an hour; she had promised, as their time together was so short, to return for tea, which Ruth thought very kind, as Aunt Emily had offered to take her to a fashionable concert. Ruth had several commissions to do, and must be off at once if she wished to return in time.

She had not been gone half an hour when Mrs. Leigh's carriage drove up to the door, and Miriam was set down. There was much hugging and kissing at parting, for Aunt Emily already dearly loved the pretty, gentle, light-hearted little creature, and looked forward with no slight impatience to the day when she should have her all to herself; and Miriam whose loving nature attached itself easily to everyone who was kind to her, was already warmly attached to the aunt, whose fine dress, manners and position inspired her with the profoundest admiration; and both affection and admiration she testified in a thousand winning, artless ways that were full of charm for the heart-weary woman of the world.

"Give my love to Ruth," called out Aunt Emily, as the carriage was already in motion, and Miriam half-way up the steps, "and tell her from me that she is a very naughty, obstinate girl."

Miriam, brimful of all that she had seen and heard, was rather inclined to resent Ruth's being out of the way; and "Oh dear!" she thought, "how dull and dreary it all looks after aunt's beautiful rooms!" Never before had their little parlour struck her thus, for never before had she missed in it Ruth's presence, that seemed at once to impart to it something bright and home-like. "Yes, it was very dull and dreary; she would see what a fire would do towards brightening it up." To work she set accordingly, piling on small wood and coal till a large fire roared in the grate. That was something

like! Her next move was to draw the only easy-chair of which the room boasted, on to the shabby hearthrug, and settle her little person into it; and that done, she fell to dreaming of the future, which, under existing circumstances, was about the pleasantest occupation she could have chosen—each happy thought reflecting itself in the flushed, smiling, radiant face, over which not the faintest shadow passed, during all that hour of silent, busy thought. It was all very wonderful and beautiful, and quite like the fairy tales she had read years ago—only far more interesting, for she herself was the fairy princess and Aunt Emily the fairy godmother. So far had she wandered from earth to fairy-land that she did not hear the click of the garden gate or the opening of the street door, and Ruth's voice in the passage was the first thing that recalled her to herself. She jumped up, and flew out to meet her, in boisterous haste, hugging and kissing her in the overflowing gladness of her heart; then laughing and chatting she brought her back into the room.

"See there, dear, what a famous fire I have made—all by myself!—isn't it splendid? I was so cold driving with Aunt Emily, and I thought you would be cold too."

Ruth praised the fire and Miriam's ingenuity, but at the same time she cast rather a rueful glance at the piled-up grate, for the day was mild, and coal was dear. Ah well, never mind; she would not want much coal that winter, if she carried out the plans she had been slowly and secretly maturing.

With the noiseless rapid movements habitual to her, she threw off her bonnet and shawl, and drawing the work-table to the window sat down at it to catch the fast-fading light.

But this was contrary to all Miriam's ideas of companionship, and she impetuously interfered. "No, Ruth, that's really too bad; you're surely not going to work now, when I had so counted upon a cosy little chat here

on the hearthrug by my beautiful fire; and now that we see so little of each other, you need not grudge me half-an-hour."

"Only give me the next half-hour's daylight and you shall have an hour's chat, if you like; but I so want to finish this to-day."

It was a black silk jacket of Miriam's that Ruth was altering and modernising, deluding herself with the fond belief that it looked quite like new, and would make rather a show among the fashionables of the West End.

"Oh, never mind that stupid old thing," said the younger sister, contemptuously. "Aunt has ordered me a new one—such a beauty! it is to cost *three pounds ten*; and for the winter I am to have a velvet—a real silk velvet from Paris, with satin trimmings. Aunt never asks what a thing costs. I'm sometimes quite frightened at the money she spends—almost as much on a dress as would have kept us in comfort for a year. How nice it is to be rich and buy everything you see; and yet aunt says she often felt very sad and miserable, but that was because she was always alone."

"Yes, it must be sad to be always alone," said Ruth, softly. In a few weeks she too would be alone, but she was not thinking of herself.

"She says she shall never feel dull and sad again, now that she has me. She is so kind and generous! And do you know, Ruth, she is quite hurt at your being so cold and reserved, and at your refusing all her offers of assistance. She says she can't reconcile herself to a niece of hers keeping a common day-school; and that if even you won't accept the home she offers, you might at least without any scruples of pride accept what *she* would never miss, and what would enable you to live quietly, but as a lady—as a niece of hers should live—independent."

"Independent I have always lived," was the quiet answer.

"Oh, but that isn't Aunt Emily's idea of independence;

she says it's all very well for those who have no rich friends to help and patronise them to work and gain their own livelihood; but that we owe it to the memory of poor mamma to hold our heads high, and she even said that your being known to keep a day-school and having a brass plate on the door would greatly interfere with my making a good match."

The last words thrown out at a venture decided the whole of Ruth's future life, and many other things besides in this our story. Nay, may we not say that the whole story hangs, as it were, on those few words? You may read to the end without perceiving this, yet so it is, and so it ever is in life—the merest chance, the most trifling incident, the most common-place word, a passing look, will be the turning point of a life; and not only of one, but of every other life in which it is bound up, and thus leading on to the most important events, it seals our fate not only for time, but for eternity.

Ruth had long been debating in her own mind whether she would have strength sufficient to carry on the school and continue the old life without Miriam: the girl's last words decided the question. She would start afresh; the obnoxious plate should be removed from the door; she would let the drawing-room floor, and go out daily teaching; it would be better, much better, than moping at home, and Aunt Emily need know nothing about it. Let her think of the first-floor lodger as a mine of wealth in herself (for it must be a lady, of course); and ignorant as she was of all that concerned the poor and the struggling, she would be satisfied and inquire no closer.

So she decided, jumping at one of those sudden conclusions that we afterwards look back upon as the inspiration of our good or evil angel. Miriam, meanwhile, having the conversation all to herself, got tired of doing nothing, and accordingly a strip of fine embroidery, whose remarkably soiled condition was proof sufficient of the time it had been in hand, was disentangled from amid a hundred other odds and ends, all pushed into a drawer, whose hopeless state of confusion would have puzzled

Queen Order herself to put straight, and six stitches were completed in silence, then she burst out afresh,—

“Aunt Emily asked me to-day whether poor mamma hadn’t left any trinkets behind, as she had very pretty ones when a girl. I said that we seldom had occasion to wear them, and had not yet divided them. Don’t you think, Ruth, we had better do so now?”

“As you like, dear.”

“Then I’ll run and get them. I declare I quite forget what we have in that old dressing-case.”

Down went the work upon the floor, and the little feet were soon heard flying up and down the stairs.

“There!” she exclaimed, as eager and breathless she seated herself on the hearthrug, with the large old-fashioned box beside her. Its contents were but few, and would have made the rich aunt smile half in scorn, half in pity. All the more costly mementos of the poor mother’s brilliant youth had long since gone—well, we will not say where. But the music-master and his wife were among the many who sometimes find it hard to live; and what cared she for the baubles, the sacrifice of which would save her husband a pang, or procure him a comfort? Still something was left—a few little treasures—souvenirs of her girlhood, or love-gifts from the man who was a lover to the last; and these Miriam held up one by one, beginning first with what had belonged to their father.

“Oh! here’s poor papa’s silver watch; that is yours of course—you want it more than I do; and aunt has promised me one of hers, such a darling!—not much larger than a sixpence, and with a green enamel back; and here are his gold spectacles, which you’ll soon want also, if you go on working in the dark as you’re doing now.”

Then followed a packet of letters, locks of hair, an old purse and pocket-book, and a bunch of keys; all of which she laid aside in silence and with a reverent hand,

feeling that they belonged of right to Ruth, though why she should feel this she could not herself have told.

"And here's mamma's gold chain—the very thing for my new watch," she proceeded, as she opened the secret drawer, "and you know you always said it should be mine. May I have it? may I take it now?"

"Yes, dear," said the low quiet voice from behind the window-curtains.

"And this bracelet—this serpent bracelet with the ruby eyes; what a pity there are not two, that we might each have one. I have no bracelet, and everybody wears bracelets at the opera. You should have seen what a beauty Lydia Woodcomb, another niece of Aunt Emily, had on, and I saw her looking at my bare arms, and felt so ashamed."

"Take the bracelet, dear—I don't want it," said the same low quiet voice, and it sounded lower and quieter even than when it had spoken last.

"That's just like you, Ruth,—always so unselfish; and so I told Aunt Emily, and she said she was glad to hear me say so, for it showed a grateful nature—as if I could be otherwise when you are always so good to me. And this pearl necklace—oh, this beautiful pearl necklace—who's to have this, eh, Ruth? Just see how becoming it is to me;" and clasping it round her neck, she jumped up to survey it and herself in the glass. "Then sometimes I could wear it in my hair: pearls are so beautiful in dark hair. But perhaps you would like to keep it yourself; would you, Ruth? Not that you ever wear it; of what use, indeed, *could* such things ever be to *you*? Aunt says that *dress*—at least, what *she* calls dress—is quite out of keeping with our present position, and that's why she waits to give me all my pretty things until I am with her."

Quite sure of the pearl necklace falling ultimately to her share, Miriam went dancing up to Ruth just to show her how well she looked in it; but she stopped short, alarmed at the strangely still attitude in which she found the usually busy, active, little figure. With her elbows

resting on the table, Ruth sat, her face buried in her hands. "What is it, Ruth, are you tired? are you ill?" she asked, in an under-breath. Ruth slowly raised her face, and Miriam actually started at its stillness—its whiteness—its odd, intent expression.

"Oh, Ruth dear, what is it? are you ill?" she repeated, beginning to cry.

No, she was not ill; only a fierce struggle had been going on within—the struggle with her own heart to crush out its more human passions and emotions and school it to resignation. Never before had she realised how completely that which in her agony of dread she had called her "all" was lost to her. Never before had she fully realised how hard the parting was.

"Are you angry with me for asking for the bracelet and the necklace? Indeed I don't want them, dear. You know I would not rob you of anything you prize."

"Then, why do you leave me; oh, why do you leave me, when you know I have nothing in the world but you?"

It was the cry of the wayward heart that would not be stilled: better have left it to itself, to have the struggle out in silence and in secret.

For the first time Miriam awoke to a suspicion of the truth, and she threw herself into Ruth's arms in an agony of tears. "I won't leave you, darling; I won't indeed! I don't care a bit for Aunt Emily and all the fine things she promises me, and I don't care if she's angry and never comes here again; indeed I wish she never had come, if it is to make you unhappy. But why didn't you say so at once, dear? You always seemed so glad for me to go that I really thought you were. It was so wicked and inconsiderate of me to forget that you might not like being left alone." Then as Ruth passed her arm softly round her neck, and drew her face down to hers to kiss it, her grief and self-reproach increased tenfold. "I am so sorry," she gasped out amid her choking sobs. "Oh, Ruth dear, let us go back to the old days when we were so happy. You used to say that I had

never given you a moment's trouble, and now I am always grieving you. But it's for the last time, dear; I'll never grieve you again, and I'll never leave you, whatever Aunt Emily may say—never!”

Miriam was quite in earnest in all she said, and was at that moment ready for any sacrifice. Ruth knew this, and was very grateful to her for the generous impulse. But she was strong now; she strained Miriam to her with passionate fondness, and as she kissed and coaxed away her tears, she felt that the struggle was over—the wayward heart was still.

CHAPTER XVI.

“I DON'T see why Mr. Lamb should be jealous, I'm sure. Of course, he's a very genteel young man, and has an elegant style in preaching; but there's no comparing him with Mr. Thornton, who must be a genius, because every one says so.”

“Of course, he's a genius; of that there can be no doubt, and I always said so—always, even when his unfortunate timidity prevented his talents being more generally recognised. You must remember, my dear, how I always said so.”

Mrs. Lovell, who enjoyed the blessed privilege of being Mrs. Snookes' dear—and a very great privilege she esteemed it—remembered nothing of the kind; on the contrary. But Mrs. Snookes was one of the most influential—nay, perhaps *the* most influential person in the parish, and, moreover, dealt largely at Mr. Lovell's shop; she must not, therefore, be contradicted.

“Yes, I said so from the first; and I have never ceased regretting the unfortunate bilious attack that prevented my going to hear that first famous sermon preached at St. Mark's, which led to his getting the curacy. It was a cruel disappointment, and you must remember

—now, don't you, dear?—how much regret I expressed at the time.”

No, Mrs. Lovell remembered no expressions of regret whatever; but, as I have before said, Mrs. Snookes must not be contradicted, so she nodded affirmatively, whilst the youngest of the Misses Snookes, who had always indulged a secret fancy for the handsome curate, here broke in pertly enough,—

“Why, ma, what nonsense you talk!—as if you couldn't have heard him every Sunday at afternoon service.”

“Afternoon service!” cried both ladies in a breath. “Whatever are you thinking of, miss? What respectable person, I should like to know, would be seen going to *afternoon service*!”

“Oh, if Mr. Thornton were to preach here *now* in the afternoon, the church would be crowded, I'll be bound.”

“And who said it wouldn't?” was the not very logical answer. “I'm sure I'd go and hear him every Sunday, if it weren't for the heat and crowd, and my head not so strong as it was, and the blood flying about me, so that I'm sure I don't sometimes know whether I'm standing on my head or heels; and so I told him the other day when I met him at dinner at Mr. Cheerman's, and asked him to dine with us to-morrow, if he'd do us the favour, and that we'd only ask a *very* select circle to meet him; but he said that if he were to accept all the kind hospitality of his old parishioners, he'd have no time left for the new, which Snookes said was just like his impertinence. But what does *he* know about West End people and their manners, I should like to know?—and when I told him that I'd invited him to dinner, he asked me why I hadn't done it long ago, when the poor young man wouldn't have turned up his nose at a good slice out of a joint, as he did now; but Snookes always is so coarse in his remarks—I declare I'm sometimes quite ashamed of him; and I turned hot all over, when he actually slapped Mr. Thornton on the back, and asked him when he was going to advertise a charitable bazaar

for the sale of all the embroidered slippers and braces the ladies of his congregation had worked him."

"And Mr. Thornton?"

"Only laughed, and said that, when he did, he should solicit the honour of his patronage."

"He had always such a pleasant way with him——"

"And there's such a distinguished air about him. I said from the first that he was quite out of place here."

"Or Mr. Lamb said it for you," again interrupted Mr. Thornton's fair advocate, purposely misunderstanding the good lady's meaning. "You never would have found out for yourself that Mr. Thornton was *common* and *country bred*, and only fit to follow the *plough*."

"Hush, miss—how dare you!" cried Mrs. Snookes, aghast, and glancing fearfully around, as if afraid that the very walls had caught and might carry on the sacrilegious words.

Mrs. Lovell, seeing that the friend whose name figured so largely in her husband's books had got the worst of it, and seemed disconcerted, hastened to the rescue.

"No; certainly no one would guess him to be a farmer's son."

"Oh, but don't you know that since his appointment to the West End curacy it has been discovered, that the Thorntons are a very old county family, and date back——"

"Further than the Creation—too old to be even mentioned in the Bible; and that's why he's so often asked out to dinner now. What a pity we didn't know it sooner! Why, we actually paid a shilling to see the skeleton of an antediluvian biped, and for eighteen months we'd a live one within six doors of us, and never even asked him to tea."

Mrs. Snookes, who, together with the rest of the Snookes family, was not a little proud of the young lady's sharp wit and tongue, was secretly congratulating herself upon the happy fruits of a foreign education—Miss Arabella having had six months of boarding-school at Boulogne, when a knock at the street door made the trio start.

"I declare if I don't think it's him! He promised to come very soon."

Miss Snookes uttered the monosyllable "Lor!" and consulted the glass. Mrs. Lovell straightened her bonnet-strings, and broke out into a profuse perspiration. Mrs. Snookes, all flushed and agitated, settled her blonde cap, and poured forth a perfect torrent of injunctions and lamentations.

"Bless my soul! and the new curtains not even up, and the holland covers still on the furniture—whatever will he think! Run, 'Bella, there's a dear, and order up wine and cake—the best three-shilling sherry, mind—not the Marsala; and if you hear your pa coming in whilst *he's* here, just slip out and tell him not to make his appearance in his old office coat; and—oh, good gracious me! do take off that apron, child, and put on your cameo brooch, and—well, I declare, if there isn't the stocking you were darning lying on the table! Here—quick—quick! Pop it under the sofa-cushion, and——"

"Oh, you needn't trouble yourself," quoth Miss 'Bella, who had been out reconnoitring over the bannisters: "it's only Mr. Lamb."

"Only Mr. Lamb!" echoed both the ladies—"only *Mr. Lamb!*"

Yes, reader, Mrs. Snookes has been the first to give you the great news, viz., of Cyril Thornton's preferment to the curacy of St. Mark's. By it his salary was doubled, and his credit rose a hundred per cent. Of the extra salary he was very glad; for the extra credit he cared but little, not even realising it until it had lost all the charm of satisfied ambition—Satisfied! when is ambition ever satisfied? By the time it became clear to Cyril that he had risen to be a sort of demi-god among his old parishioners of the East End, he had ceased to care for their worship; he had other aims, other connections, and they, and all that related to them, had passed away altogether from his life. Was it possible that he had ever cared for their approbation?—ever felt a thrill of exultation at an unexpected invitation to tea—ever felt

a pang at some vulgar slight—ever envied Mr. Lamb his popularity and their esteem? With what lofty disdain could he now shrug his shoulders at the remembrance of what had once been so bitter.

And this contempt for the past, which comes to all, should be taken as the best antidote to the poison of the present. What now disturbs our digestion, robs us of sleep, appears to us when seen through the magnifying-glass of fear, as a great trouble, will be a joke this time next year. With what scornful pity does youth look back upon the sorrows of childhood, the man upon the passions of youth, old age upon the trials of manhood; and in our future disembodied life, wherever that life may be, how hardly shall we realise, if memory be left to us, the tears, groans, and lamentations of the life that was! Had such an unexpected stroke of good fortune come to Cyril during those eighteen months of disappointment and mortification, it would have been a triumph indeed; but, fresh from home and all its love, the congratulations of those among whom he had so long lived a stranger sounded hollow enough. The truth is, he had had a month of thorough petting and spoiling, and the kiss he had laughingly stolen at parting from Birdie's warm rosy lips had steeled his heart against the flattery of all other lips, more particularly those of his old parishioners; and as for the new, he was still too much of a stranger among them to feel anything but embarrassment. His natural shyness and the false shame of a sensitive nature prevented his making the most of his position, and he shrank from, rather than courted, society. In the pulpit, alone with God and his inspirations, he felt himself both apart from and above the congregation; what cared he, then, for their fine airs and criticisms? But pinned down to a chair between two gossiping old dowagers or monosyllabic young ladies, or forming one of a group of your drawing-room loungers, dashing beaux, or elderly politicians, he felt awkward and out of place, without a word to say for himself; and what increased his confusion tenfold was the unpleasant consciousness that something

more was expected of him, the eloquent preacher, than the mere set phrases of health and weather, and yet it was with difficulty that he got through even these.

The only time that he felt something like pride was when he wrote to announce his advancement to all at home. By return of post came the congratulations—a line from mother, a message from father and Hal, who were busy carting manure, and a long happy letter from Mary, who expressed extreme indignation at his viewing his promotion in the light of an accident, when it was of course the reward of his talents, the first stepping-stone to that career of honour and usefulness she had so glowingly mapped out for him.

So she wrote, and so, in her simple faith, she believed; and Farmer Thornton, who saw in it all a mere matter of pounds, shillings, and pence, so much more in the boy's pocket, wondered at the extraordinary state of excitement into which it had thrown her, declaring that she made as much fuss about it as if it had been some fine thing for herself. For herself, indeed! As if Cyril were not the dearest part of herself. Were not their hopes, their fears, their interests one? Was not his future her future?—his life her life? Had he not said so himself? and would not each onward step bring them nearer and nearer together, until—— But why betray the most secret and therefore most sacred feelings of a young girl's life? She was happy—so happy that her heart was almost oppressed with the sense of its own blessedness, like the homeward-wending bee that, laden with the rich summer spoils, feels the weight of the treasured burden over which it murmurs so softly.

Cyril's outward circumstances were much improved by his increase of salary; he could now afford two rooms instead of one, and as his landlady, if she cheated, respected him, he was no longer kept waiting at the street door. His toast, too, was now made by a clear fire; and though the first strength of his tea went to settle the good lady's weak nerves, she being much addicted to hysterics, there was still flavour enough left in the pot

to satisfy his moderate desires. Then, too, he no longer found it necessary to wear a threadbare coat, cotton gloves, and wield an alpaca umbrella; he had more money too to distribute among the poor, though less time to go in and out among them; and somehow he did not get on as well with his poorer parishioners as in the old days when he was nearer to them in sympathy—when he could tell them, in the words of simple truth, that he, too, often felt cold and hunger and weariness.

One day as he sat in his neatly furnished parlour collecting notes for the next Sunday's sermon, two letters were brought in; the one from his tailor—a flourishing bill whose amount made his flesh creep, and his hair stand on end. Mr. Trim had been recommended as fashionable and moderate—*very* moderate—alas! for our comparative ideas of things!—and, besides giving general satisfaction, he gave long credit, at least to those who, like Mr. Thornton, put in a genteel appearance, lived in superior apartments, was known to pay his rent regularly, and was sometimes seen to knock at the door of “great houses;” and if he prudently tacked on somewhat too high a percentage of interest to the items of the bill, was not the unjust steward's worldly foresight commended?

But long credit was altogether contrary to the principles in which Cyril had been brought up, and to which he had strictly adhered through all his college life even until now; he, therefore, with another rueful glance at the sum total, and a muttered exclamation that in any other might have degenerated into an oath, counted out the money from his small reserved store, and laid it, together with the bill, in his pocket-book, wisely resolving to bear the shock with Christian fortitude, and look out for another tailor.

So much for missive No. 1. What was missive No. 2? As dainty a little note as was ever penned, and so delicately scented, that as he opened it quite a queer feeling came over him, and he could almost have fancied himself once more the idle dreamer lying on the violet bank

at home within sight of the dark Alton woods and the bright glancing river, and with that faint, sweet, intoxicating perfume floating like the breath of angel-visitants around him.

It was not the first time that he had received some such graceful feminine reminder that he was now a public character; but whether it was the note itself, or the particular mood in which it found him, or whether some secret influence, subtle and mysterious, drew him irresistibly to the writer—certain it is that it interested him in no common degree. It was a pretty, tender, girlish effusion, such as any innocent school-girl might have written. The young lady—and he guessed her to be very young indeed—had heard him on Sunday evening last for the first time, and his words had touched her heart, and fired her imagination. Even as she wrote, his discourse, rather than himself, filled her mind and paper. Deifying him for his work's sake, she addressed him with a certain timid awe, repeating more than once that she would never have dared to write thus, had she not been so sure that they could not meet.

A smile quivered over the young man's lips as he closed it, but it pleased him, and set him wondering who his unknown correspondent could be. He took a mental review of all his female acquaintance, and as they passed one by one before him, he was led on to another train of thought, and for the first time it struck him as strange that among all the women he had met in society, among whom were many whose beauty, grace, and refinement of manners might well have turned the head of the country-bred enthusiast, not one had interested him. Not once had his heart been touched, and his fancy only once, by a gay little East End widow, who had singled him out when others overlooked him, had laughed and coquetted, treated him to smiles, flatteries, and nice little suppers, and, having fairly caught him, had suddenly dropped the prize to seize on another more worth the having. A fat little broker came in between and parted them. He lost the nice little suppers and the gay little

widow, who now laughed at, instead of with him; there was a fine wedding and wedding breakfast, which Mr. Lamb was asked to grace for the sake of the elegant speech, without which no East End wedding was thought complete.

Cyril, having got thus far in his reminiscences, yawned, stretched himself, and, seeing how the sunlight danced about on his parlour wall, thought he would go and see what London looked like out of doors.

“Eh, Keeper, old fellow, what do you say to a stroll?”

A large retriever lying on the hearth-rug lifted his head from between his paws; but as, in following the master's fortunes, the dog may again be brought under our notice, let us here pause to introduce him more particularly. His name is Keeper; his age, two years and three months; his colour black; his nature mild and contemplative. Born on Manor Farm, brought up by Cousin Mary, from whom he received his earliest impressions and a very careful education, he had by her been presented to his present owner—her first love gift! (if kisses and caresses do not come under the category), with many an earnest injunction to be true to his education, and guard, protect, and serve the man she loved as faithfully as she would, were she allowed to follow him.

Keeper evidently understood his master's words, for he rose, shook himself, and, walking deliberately into the next room, brought therefrom his hat and gloves.

As Cyril was about to leave the room, he caught sight of the violet-scented note lying open on the table. It must not be left there to meet the curious eye of landlady or casual visitor. He was about to tear it up and consign it to the grate, when a certain undefinable something stopped him, and he threw it into a drawer instead.

After sauntering through the now almost deserted park, he turned into Piccadilly, and was returning home when he came suddenly upon a new but pleasant acquaintance, the only person in London with whom he at all *chummed*—Captain Hartwell—the very person of all others to be

universally popular, being the happy possessor of a good fortune, good connections, good looks, good health, spirits, and temper, and a good heart into the bargain—altogether a thoroughly good fellow. He and Cyril got on, to use his own expression, like a house on fire; it was he, indeed, who had recommended Mr. Trim, and for many other kind offices was he indebted to him of the same kind.

The captain was holding on to the curate's button-hole, and rattling away in his usual hare-brained fashion, when a cry of alarm, followed by the trembling, half-tearful command, "Down, down!" made both gentlemen start and turn.

Standing just outside a milliner's shop, they saw a young lady holding, huddled up in her arms, as diminutive a specimen of doghood as could well be imagined. Perhaps Keeper never having seen anything so small, it took his fancy, or perhaps he merely looked upon it as a London curiosity. Certain it is, however, that he claimed a nearer acquaintance, obstructing the young girl's path, and looking up with eagerly expectant eyes, and tail gently sweeping the dusty pavement.

"Down, down! naughty dog!" repeated the fair protector of the ribbon-bedecked pet.

Keeper cocked his head on one side, and gave vent to a mournful howl, which so tickled the girl's fancy that her whole face broke out into dimpling laughter.

Cyril hastened to the rescue, called off the dog, and apologised for his rough country manners.

The young girl blushed prettily as her eye glanced up at the captain; but when it fell on Cyril, the blood rushed in a warm, vivid flood over brow, cheek, and neck, and with a shy, nervous bend of the head that could scarcely be dignified by the name of bow, she hurried on to a carriage that awaited her at the corner, and, jumping in with more haste than grace, she hid away her pretty rosy little face in its depths.

"Oh, aunt, I was so frightened!"

"Silly child!" The aunt little guessed *why* the foolish heart beat so tumultuously under the new velvet jacket.

"Why, I declare," she continued, raising her eyeglass and leaning forward, "it's Charlie Hartwell! Ah, he recognises me and bows. What a pity that I was not there to have introduced you. He is a prime favourite of mine. Was it his dog that attacked Pip?"

The girl did not answer.

"By Jove!" was the captain's exclamation as the carriage rolled out of sight.

"Who are they?" questioned his companion.

"They! Oh, the one is Mrs. Charlton Leigh, a very agreeable woman, and the most desperate lion-hunter of her sex. *Gare à vous!* if she has but caught sight of you in my company, neither she nor your humble servant will have any peace of their lives until you are brought captive and bound before her; but then she'll deal mercifully by you, perhaps even make quite a pet of you."

"And the young lady is her daughter?"

"Not she; Mrs. Leigh is a widow without incumbrance, and wherever she picked up that fine girl——"

"*Fine girl!*" interrupted Cyril, impatiently. "Of all slang terms, I dislike that one most. Time was when all women were goddesses; now the goddesses themselves are only fine women—stately Junos, wise Minervas, laughing Hebes, bashful wood nymphs—all come under the one denomination. I verily believe were Venus herself to rise before you from the bosom of the ocean in her pearly char, and invested with all the sacred glory of her new-born divinity, you'd call her—a fine woman!"

"And she'd be much flattered at the compliment, no doubt; but I don't think our little London divinity rose from the bosom of the ocean. Then where the deuce has she come from? I thought I knew every pretty girl who's out."

"But, perhaps, she is not yet out; she seemed such a very young creature."

"You've hit it, old boy!" cried the captain excitedly.

"Not out yet—no, of course not—only allowed to appear on the sly, when there's no one in town to look at her. That accounts for her blush. Our young ladies now-a-days forget that virgin accomplishment before they even forget their pence table. I shall call upon the old lady—she's always glad to see me, I know—and it'll be a pretty gentlemanly way of getting at the bottom of it to ask after the young lady who was so terribly frightened by the rascally curate's rascally dog—eh, what did you say?"

"That it's time to go home," said Cyril Thornton, drily. "This is about as draughty a corner as any in London, and I've no cigar to keep the circulation going."

"A remarkably fine girl, by Jove!" was the incorrigible captain's mental exclamation as, throwing away the end of his third cigar, he turned into his club.

"Keeper, aren't you ashamed of yourself?" Cyril had returned to his arm-chair, and the solitude of his own room and thoughts. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, sir?"

Keeper sighed, though whether at the remembrance of his past misconduct or from a sense of particular ill-usage in the matter of the white-ribbon-bedecked ball, or because his fancy for the first time was fired, and he found the novel sensation unpleasant, would be difficult for us to decide.

"A very sweet face, certainly—so young, so fresh, so soft. I wonder why she blushed, and looked so confused on seeing me. I hope she was not really frightened, poor little thing!"

Cyril somehow felt that he and Keeper between them had certainly distressed the pretty stranger, and it was perhaps this reflection, and the remorse it invoked, that interfered so sadly with his quiet study that evening, and haunted him so persistently for many a day.

CHAPTER XVII.

WERE you to call a meeting of married men, and force from them their opinion of matrimony after a year's experience of it, the general verdict would, I fear be unfavourable; and this, not because they have not, for the most part, good faithful wives, household models in many respects, no doubt, but because the said wives have some unfortunate peculiarity, some petty failing, patent neither to themselves nor to the world, but only to the husband, whose domestic happiness is made shipwreck by it. And the worst of it is that there is no remedy for this lesser as there is for the greater evil. A man cannot bring his wife into the divorce courts because she happens to be jealous, exacting, or addicted to crying, or, let us say, untidy, unpunctual, and a bad caterer, who, herself incapable of appreciating a good dinner, has little sympathy for the husband who objects to burnt chops, nor even because she has a dislike to smoking and to her lord's friends.

This is why too often a really wicked woman with tact, is more beloved, because much easier to live with, than your good woman without. Great events alone call forth great virtues and great vices, whereas the daily life of every one of us is made happy or otherwise by the most trifling common-places. This young lady is a pattern of modesty, propriety, and all other cardinal virtues; but her manners are unpleasant, her conversation boring, and we shun her as we would the plague. That girl, on the contrary, winning and lively, is a heartless coquette, who counts her victims, as market-women do their eggs, by the score. "What of that? she's a jolly little thing, and men should know how to take better care of their hearts." The little flirt is decidedly popular. M. has a wife who is certainly the grey mare, but has the happy art of keeping her lord in blessed ignorance of the fact. Moreover, it cannot be denied that she is selfish, extravagant, interested to her finger-tips, and

somewhat too fond of gaiety for a sober matron. What cares M. for all this? In his eyes she is an angel, for she is always bright and good-tempered; does not object to his pipe or his cronies, nor even to his slippers; repays cheques with smiles and kisses, keeps a good table, dresses well, and altogether does him credit. Were he to die, which he would do blessing her, she would marry within two years; were he to lose her, he would himself be lost, and declare to his dying day that there never was such a wife. N., on the contrary, whose wife adores him, whose wife is the noblest and most disinterested creature in the world, without a thought beyond her home, curses every hour of his life the folly that led him into a love-match; and why? Because poor little Mrs. N., instead of proving *her* love by a due regard for his animal comforts, and a careful revision of his shirt-buttons, tries the strength of *his* by constant jealousies, exactions, frowns, and tears. Though she would die to save him a pang, she has not unfrequently forced him to contemplate suicide as a happy release. Were Mrs. N. to die, N. would return to his bachelor life, and never again put his head into the fatal noose; whilst she, on the contrary, would bury in her husband's grave youth, hope, and whatever else makes life worth the having, and, broken-hearted, she would from thenceforth torment herself and every one around her, and the world would cry, "What a devoted wife! What a happy man N. must have been!"

Dr. Cameron had been married a year, and during that year he had won for himself much increase of distinction and an ever-extending connection. Though comparatively young, he was acknowledged as one of the greatest medical authorities of the day, and no student's library was complete without his writings, which, deep and far-seeing, but short, concise, and to the point, often proved in six lines what others had failed to make clear in as many pages. As to his domestic life, it was very much what might have been expected. The world, seeing him thus immersed in his profession, accused him, according to the laws of

gossip and slander—that altereth not—of neglecting his poor young wife, and denying her the innocent recreation of ball and opera, of burying her alive in that dull old house, with that horrid old Scotch dragon as her sole companion and keeper. Not that Mrs. Cameron ever complained, or seemed to care for society more than her husband, shrinking, indeed, from every advance that was made to her with almost nervous dread. Had the doctor been more popular, there would have been a general outcry against the *poor young wife*, who was now an object of such tender compassion. She must be a victim, or a most fruitful and interesting topic of conversation would be lost to them. On no account would they have been convinced that she did very much as she liked, and was about as little interfered with as any wife in England. Had she found cause for complaint, her husband would have been the first to hear of it, for Winifred was not one to keep any grievance to herself, at least at this stage of her history. Every trouble, however slight, she at once transferred from her shoulders to his; so far she had taken him at his word, and her childish trust in him was as full and entire as was ever placed by the weak in the strong. Not a thought or feeling passed through her but she imparted it to him without hesitation or disguise; and this said much for his indulgence; for her nature, strange, shrinking, and imperfect, was at once thrown back upon itself by a harsh word or even look; but such a word or look had not as yet come between them. Grace Ingles, who so well understood her master's hard, stern character, so intolerant of the follies and frailties of others, often wondered whether it was excess of love that made him so blind and so indulgent to the pretty, spoilt wife, who never had a thought beyond herself.

The last six months of the year bringing her a double claim to indulgence, made the weak woman more than ever sacred in the strong man's eyes. Whatever love could do to soften Winifred's hour of trial was done, but from the moment she realised her position she gave

way to the most unreasoning and exaggerated fears. "She would die in childbed, she knew she would; her mother had before her, and nurse always said she was so like her mother. It was not that she feared death—oh no! if only it would come suddenly, without warning and without pain; but it was so dreadful to have to watch its approach hour by hour—all the more dreadful because so great a mystery—and she thought of it all day long as she sat alone, and Grace would never let her talk about it, because she said it was wicked, and a tempting of the Almighty."

"Poor little lonely thing!" thought the doctor, compassionately; and he gave up his usual evening stroll, and curtailed his hours of reading and study, to devote the time to her, listening in patient silence to her complaints, and trying by good and gentle words to cheer and strengthen her. Never before, perhaps, had James Cameron tried his powers of consolation in vain, but here they failed signally, only furnishing a further cause for complaint; for, instigated by Mrs. Joyce, who expressed herself strongly on the subject of men presuming to meddle in what they did not, and never could, know anything about, Winifred resented all attempts at comfort almost as a personal affront.

Sometimes, in those first days of weakness and depression, longing to give her hope and courage, he would speak softly and reverently of the happiness that awaited her—of the deep, holy joys of maternity, of all that the little creature, whose advent was now shrouded in mystery and terror, would be to her—to both of them. Words such as these, coming from that cold, hard man, might well have touched the most insensible heart; but in vain did he appeal to the weak, trembling woman in behalf of their unborn child. Winifred seemed altogether incapable of understanding even the meaning of his words. But, though he sighed, he did not blame her. "Maternity will teach its own beautiful lesson," he thought. "Only a mother can realise a mother's love; she will begin to live in the little being to whom she has given life, and

my child-wife will be a woman at last." His child-wife! Yes, nothing more as yet; a foolish helpless child, to be petted and indulged. And strongly beat the old pity at his heart as he softened his voice and unbent his brow in her presence.

Winifred, however, was not satisfied with tender forbearance: she had restless longings for all sorts of impossible things; but few things are impossible to love, and it was seldom that a wish of hers remained ungratified.

There can be no doubt that, taking the common average of men, their weak side is that of the heart, their strong that of the pocket. The former may often be captured by a smile or a tear, whilst the latter is found impregnable to every assault. Mrs. Cameron spared neither the one nor the other. It needed but Mrs. Joyce's passing remark, "My dear, if Joyce had half your husband's practice, I should make him give me a carriage and pair," to induce her to look upon a carriage and pair as indispensable to her comfort and welfare. That same evening, therefore, she asked for one with as little hesitation as if asking for a five-pound note. She pleaded her weakness, her longing for fresh air, the impossibility of walking far, his own words that she should take more exercise.

He proposed that a fly should call for her regularly, and she upbraided him with his cruelty. "A fly, indeed!" which meant strange horses that would run away with her, a drunken coachman who would join in the conspiracy against her life. No; if she drove at all, it would be with the doctor's own beautiful bays, and she clapped her hands with childish delight at the thought, and wondered what Mrs. Joyce would say.

"You might spare them just till baby is born, James, only just till baby is born."

"And what is meanwhile to become of me and of my patients?" asked the doctor, who looked upon his horses, as he looked upon his watch or case of instruments, as indispensable to his profession.

But Winifred had her answer ready.

"You will have other horses, of course; you are not afraid of being upset; and other doctors keep two carriages, who have not half your income."

Or half his responsibilities, he might have answered, for his estimate of the obligations of the rich to the poor were peculiar to himself. Philanthropy is as costly a taste as the collecting of old books and pictures. Take the widow and orphan under your protection, and they will spring up like mushrooms, until you begin to doubt whether any woman has a husband, or any child a father. Dr. Cameron did not doubt—he relieved; there was an old debt to be paid, and he was trying to pay it off by instalments.

Thus it was that, though his receipts exceeded, perhaps, the world's calculation, the part he reserved for himself was small, indeed, compared with the whole. The world called him a hard-hearted man; it called him an avaricious man, too.

James Cameron was not one to give his confidence easily; to a wife worthy in every sense, of the title, he might have opened his heart, and, once opened, his trust would have been unbounded. But Winifred was only for him a child, to be guided, not consulted: with her, charity began and ended at home, and to the selfish, self-indulgent woman a carriage and pair seemed as indispensable a necessary as bread and blankets to the hardy poor. He did not, therefore, enter into particulars; he simply told her that the expense of two carriages would be too great.

"Too great! Oh, James, you once told me that no sacrifice would be too great that I could ask of you; and now——" She drew out her handkerchief, for her tears were falling fast. "I would not have asked you," she faltered, amid her rising sobs, "but that I feel so weak and am so much alone, and that I long for the fresh air and can't get out; and it wouldn't be for long, for if I die as poor mamma did——"

Here she again broke off.

James Cameron was too well accustomed to her morbid fancies to be much affected by them. He had been

pacing the room, wondering, perhaps, within himself how women could be so unreasonable. At her last words, he turned and looked at her. The dark, wet lash lying heavily on the colourless cheek made it even whiter by the contrast. Yes, he could lose her; she might pass from his life as Lucy had done! His heart gave a great throb, and involuntarily he held out his arms as if to gather her into them. Was she not his own to hold and to keep till death should them part?

Alas! that so impassable a gulf should so often separate those sharing the same home in life, the same grave in death. The caresses that are never returned become impossible. Winifred's tears were not kissed away, but she got what she wanted.

Dr. Cameron kept two carriages; his wife's wish was gratified, and the poor did not suffer; for shortly afterwards the medical world hailed a new pamphlet, which brought its author in both fame and money. Every one was satisfied but Grace, who knew how many an hour, stolen from his night's rest, the work had cost her master. "As if he did not work hard enough in the day without writing the long night through!"

"I certainly think, Grace," he one day remarked, with a well-satisfied smile, "that Mrs. Cameron looks brighter and better for her daily drives. I should have thought of it for her before."

"Don't you think, ma'am," said Grace that same evening to her mistress, "that master's looking very thin and poorly lately?"

"No; I have noticed nothing."

"No, of course not; that's just it, no one notices anything until it is too late; it was so with sweet Miss Lucy, but it was the Lord's doing, and He knows best. She was too good——"

"Oh yes, I know; you have told me all that before. People who die are always too good to live; but no one finds it out till they are dead."

"And more's the pity," said Grace, tartly: "better value them during their life, than miss them after their death."

Winifred was combing out her bright hair before the glass, and smiling softly to the fair face reflected in it; but at the word *death* the smile vanished, and she turned round upon the old woman with as much anger as she was capable of.

"Why do you speak of death? you know I cannot bear it; and it is very unkind of you to say such dreadful things when you see how nervous I am."

Grace, choking with indignation, stalked out of the room.

As the hour so dreaded approached, Winifred's exactions increased tenfold. Again and again the doctor was summoned from the sick and even death beds of his patients to attend his wife, who declared herself dying. This to a man of his temperament was anything but agreeable, and it not unfrequently placed him in an awkward and ridiculous light; but a look at the little white face, the touch of the small nervous hand that clung to his as if for protection, disarmed him, and for her he had only soft words and looks.

His feelings, however, had yet to undergo a trial greater than all that had gone before.

One day, on entering his wife's room he found Winifred flushed and eager, talking to an individual in a rainbow-coloured shawl, and bonnet of vast dimensions, adorned with a perfect meadow of corn-flowers. This individual was Nurse Malloney; and Winifred, turning to him, said, in the quiet tone of the wife who has no fear of her will being disputed, "Nurse has come all the way from Ireland to see me, James, and she is going to stay with me till after baby's birth. I am so glad."

Dr. Cameron made no objection then, but once alone with his wife he expressed his disapproval in strong terms. He hated strangers; accustomed for the last ten years to the familiar faces of Matthews and Grace, the idea of a new inmate, and such an inmate as Mrs. Malloney, filled him with dismay. What would Grace say? The domestic harmony of his household was threatened; but Winifred leaned her head on his shoulder, and twined

her wee fingers about his, and said softly, "She was with poor mamma when she died. I have no mother to be with me when my hour comes; let her stay, James."

No mother, no! nor sister, nor friend, poor lonely child! every objection dwarfed before such a plea. Winifred gained her point; nurse stayed, and entered at once upon her duties as Mrs. Cameron's maid.

To Grace she paid special court trying to win her favour by well-turned compliments upon her tea, her caps, and wonderfully youthful appearance—three points upon which she had always found spinster housekeepers peculiarly sensitive; but Grace was not to be softened. The Irishwoman *was* an Irishwoman and a Papist. She remained grim and uncompromising, repelling all her advances with an impatient, "Tut, woman, keep your fine words for those who value them. The Scripture text says, 'Let your conversation be Yea, yea, nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.'"

No one thought of asking Mrs. Malloney how she had found out her old mistress, nor would she have told them the truth if they had; for matters stood thus.

On leaving Belgrave Square, she had returned to Ireland and lived with her dutiful nephew until he had turned her out of doors. It was all very well to put up with her whims, to devote to her use the only room held sacred from the intrusion of pigs and poultry, to act the part of peacemaker when his wife and she came to blows and abuse—all this was easy enough when a few comfortable hundreds, the tidy savings of years, were weighed in the balance with nephewly duties; but the savings having gone in an unlucky speculation, the aunt was turned out with less consideration to her feelings than would have been shown to those of a neighbour's pig invading the premises. Thus cast adrift, she bethought her of her darling Miss Winnie, and wrote her a heart-rending account of her sufferings, addressed to Dunweannie Farm, where she supposed her still to be. The letter was returned to her unopened.

"It's the old sarpant herself has done it!" was her

wrathful exclamation; and seeing no hope of assistance from that quarter, she went up to London and tried for a situation, but for some time in vain. Her resources being at the lowest ebb, she resolved as a last desperate measure to apply to Dr. Cameron. He could help her, if he would. To Russell Square she accordingly went. Matthews knew that it was as much as his place was worth to turn away a suppliant, and so, the doctor not being at home, nurse was taken up to the doctor's wife, who, to her unbounded delight and amazement, turned out to be her old mistress and nursling.

She was Irish, and Winifred was the one thing in the world she loved: the scene therefore that ensued may be more easily imagined than described. The first excitement over, she began to look about her; all spoke of comfort and even wealth, and she saw no reason why she should not share her mistress's good fortune. No time was to be lost: she knew how Miss Winnie could best be won over, by awakening her fears; and she began by professing herself deeply shocked at her delicate appearance. "Wasn't she just as white as a lily, and the living image of her blessed mother, who, poor lamb! had been as good as murdered——"

"Murdered!" echoed Winifred, aghast. This was a new and startling aspect under which the dead mother appeared to her.

"Yes, murdered, my lily; nothing more nor less—murdered by the monthly; and she's not the first nor the last. Do you ask me why so many tender young things die without so much as looking on their infants' face? I answer, it's the *monthlies*!"

She paused, to give full effect to her words, uttered in so deep and solemn a tone that they froze the blood in the listener's veins.

"Yes, it's the monthlies," she continued, "and its wondering I am that any mother or babe escapes them. But, sure, doesn't the Lord and His Blessed Mother" (here she crossed herself) "watch over the innocents and protect them from the monthly and her bottle?"

"Oh, but Dr. Cameron doesn't allow anyone to have a bottle."

"A monthly without a bottle isn't a monthly," interrupted Nurse Malloney in a tone of decision.

"Oh no, indeed, the doctor is so particular; no one drinks anything but tea that he engages."

"Not drink! a *monthly not drink!* there you're lost as sure as my name's Malloney! it's not the Blessed Lady herself could save you;" and nurse threw up her hands with a gesture of despair.

Winifred looked terribly scared and inclined to cry.

"Yes, you're lost, my pearl, and it's the Gospel truth I'm speaking. A monthly who drinks, and isn't ashamed of her bottle, is bad enough; a monthly who drinks on the sly is worse; but a monthly who doesn't drink at all isn't a monthly, and what, in the name of old Ireland, is to be hoped from a monthly *who isn't a monthly?*"

Such logic as this was unanswerable, and when nurse, out of tender regard for her peace of mind (as she pathetically declared), proceeded to regale her with a hideous list of casualties, all resulting from the gross neglect of *monthlies*, Winifred, who could believe anything and everything, grew helplessly terrified, and caught eagerly at the offer she made of her services, waxing the more urgent the more she demurred—apparently divided between devotion to her darling Miss Winnie and pity for the loving nephew, nephew's wife, and eleven children, who would one and all be just broken-hearted at her loss. But devotion won the day. And so it came to pass that Nurse Malloney became an inmate of the doctor's house.

Winifred's hour of trial came and passed, and James Cameron bent over the mother's pillow, and looked into the great eyes that, uplifted to his, were so full of a great and holy calm.

"Oh, James," she said, in a soft, faint whisper, "it is all like a dream—so strange, so awful; but it is over now. Kiss me, dear; I am very tired."

"My wife, my darling," was all that he could say, but he stooped and reverently kissed the pale lips. Then he knelt beside the bed, and, bowing his head down upon the little hand thrown listlessly over the coverlet, he prayed.

Winifred's recovery was slow; but from the moment nurse had put the child into her arms, and that her husband had stooped over her and kissed her lips, all fear had vanished. Never had she appeared so calm, so happy. When the doctor was away, she would sit for hours with baby on her lap. She nursed it herself. Her husband, who had a horror of strange nursing—taken more from a moral than a physical point of view—had insisted upon it. At first the thought had frightened her, but she submitted, as she always did, when he exerted his authority. And so she held her child to her breast, and looked scared and troubled when it cried, and called for nurse to take it away. But when it laughed up in her face, she laughed too, and played with its wee fingers, and sometimes sang to it soft snatches of Irish melody—recollections of her own childhood—as it lay asleep on her knee.

And yet maternity had not done its perfect work; it had not made a woman of James Cameron's child-wife. For a month all went on as well as could have been expected. It was quite in Winifred's nature to be satisfied with the luxury of an easy-chair, a fire, and a book, with an occasional chat with nurse, a quiet half-hour with James, and a soft game at play with baby. She never looked beyond the present moment, its ease and comforts. And seeing her happy, James Cameron was happy too; so happy, that sometimes, as he watched her sitting opposite to him on their blazing hearth in all her innocent beauty, his child in her arms, he wondered how blessings so great could indeed be his; how his life, hitherto so joyless and barren, had contrived to make for itself new sacred joys, of which it had never even dreamt. And because the feelings, almost as yet a mystery to himself, lay so deep, he found it impossible to

give expression to them. No pretty young wife was ever perhaps less caressed, or had fewer tender little speeches made to her. If she could not read her husband's love in his actions, and sometimes in his eyes, there was little chance of her ever knowing anything about it.

To their child he was equally undemonstrative. Mrs. Joyce threw up her eyes and hands in actual horror on hearing that he had never so much as kissed it. "Not kissed the baby! Why, Mrs. Cameron's husband was not a man; he was a monster!" And in this opinion Nurse Malloney entirely concurred.

James Cameron had not once kissed his child. No, and more than this, he took very little notice of it; yet it was the first thing his eyes sought on entering the room; when he had found it, he smiled and was content.

Perhaps, had Winifred spoken more of it herself, drawn his attention to it, or shown that she set any value upon his notice of it, he would for her sake have overcome his natural reserve, and the little creature might thus from the first have become a strong bond of sympathy between them. But Mrs. Cameron very seldom made it the subject of conversation.

The first time she showed anything like anxiety about its future was in the choice of a name. This was about a week after baby's birth. She had been thinking much about it all day, and the doctor had hardly reached her bedside on his return, when she exclaimed, with no little eagerness, "What shall we call him, James? He is to be christened, and I have not yet chosen his name. It must be something very pretty. I have been thinking of it all day. I asked nurse, and she brought down the Catholic calendar; but the saints had all such dreadfully hard names, and so ugly. Can't you think of anything?"

James Cameron had never for a moment dreamt of the child being called by any other name than his own. It was a family name descending from father to son. He could think of no better, and suggested it.

Winifred shook her head. "But that is not at all pretty; and besides I'm so tired of it. Ah! I know now—how stupid of me not to have thought of it before; I will call him Philip."

James Cameron started. He had once dearly loved some one of that name, and he could never again hear it with composure. And that it should be given to his child, his first-born! It was as if the mother had chosen it in very wanton cruelty. "What made you think of *that* name, Winifred?"

"It was papa's name—don't you remember? I should like baby to have it too. Shall we call him so, James?"

Ill-fated father—ill-fated friend! name doubly ill-omened! There was a sharp struggle in the father's breast between the faith that fears nothing, and the anxious love that fears all.

He deferred his answer so long that Winifred, taking his silence for consent, had dismissed the subject altogether from her mind.

He had moved away from her side, and was standing by the cradle, his eyes bent down upon the sleeping child. At last, laying his hand upon the little head as if in blessing, he said solemnly, "Yes, Winifred, we will call him Philip." Faith in such a man as James Cameron is stronger even than love. But the child was not called Philip after all: nurse would not hear of it. "Give the blessed infant the name of the dead father who died off all of a sudden, no one knew how? the Lord and His Mother forbid!" After much further consultation it was decided that he should be called Willie; not William—that was very ugly, Winifred declared,—but Willie, which was soft and pretty, and just fit for her new plaything.

During all the time Winifred Cameron was confined to her room, no one was admitted into it. She positively refused to see any one, or even to look at the cards that were brought up to her. Her narrow world, bounded by those four walls, sufficed her; she never cared to look beyond.

"And you are really hard-hearted enough to refuse admittance to your *dear friend*, Mrs. Joyce?" asked the doctor one day, with a slightly sarcastic inflexion of the voice, but well pleased to be spared the infliction of the worthy lady's presence.

"Yes," she answered simply, "I want no one but nurse and you." And so it was; day by day she clung closer to him, rested in him more fully, was altogether sweet, soft, and beautiful. "I want no one but you," she repeated. And feeling very weak and tired, she leaned her head back upon his shoulder. And in the silence of his heart he blessed her, but could not for the life of him have told her how full that heart was of love and tenderness for her and her little one.

Winifred continued to nurse her baby, and the report proudly circulated by nurse was, that mother and child were thriving in the most wonderful manner.

James Cameron, going into his wife's room one evening after some hours devoted to hard work in his study—a treat he very seldom now allowed himself, all his leisure time being devoted to her—found her alone, lying back in the arm-chair, her eyes closed, and a look on her face he had never seen there before. What was it?—the reflection of the fire-light, which was the only light in the room?

As he bent over her chair whispering anxiously, "Are you well, dear?" the blue eyes opened, and were one moment raised to his, then they fell heavily together. Alarmed, he struck a light and rang the bell.

Just then baby, awaking, set up a piteous wail. The mother's eye unclosed once more, and, half wild, half wistful, were turned upon it. "Give it to me, James." It was laid in her lap, and she held it to her breast with a quick, almost convulsive movement; but the retaining arms soon released their hold, and dropped slowly away from one another; she shook her head and looked up piteously into her husband's face—"I can't."

He took it from her and gave it to nurse, who just

then entered. "Take it away," he said in a sharp suppressed tone, "and send Grace up to me."

Winifred was in danger—in imminent danger; and her husband knew it, realised it in all its fulness of horror and despair. The shadow of death was already darkening over the silent room, over the still white face—the only woman's face James Cameron had ever thought beautiful! Would the skill that had saved so many, avail to save her—his wife—his darling?

All that could be done was done, then he sat down beside her, encircled her with his arms, drew her head on to his breast and waited.

For some time she lay very quiet, and he held in his breath not to disturb her, then she moved slightly and smiled up at him—a faint smile that had in it something solemn, because of the awful shadow that lay over her face. And he answered to it, and knew that it was perhaps the last that they would ever exchange.

By-and-by she began to talk, in a very low voice that was scarcely more than a whisper; but in the silence of the room, and with her face half raised to his, he managed not to lose a word.

"I know what it is, dear, quite well; but I am not afraid. I am glad that it has come now, and that all will be over. I once thought it would be so hard, and now I feel so happy, so ready—so glad to go."

"Glad to go, and leave me alone!"

He would have checked the involuntary cry of his heart if he could, but it was impossible.

"It is better so—better for both that I should go *now*—it all seems quite clear; and there is so much I would say to you about yourself and baby and me, if only I knew how! But I feel that it is better I should die *now*, when you will have a kind thought of me, and remember me with pleasure."

"With pleasure?—oh, God!"

"Yes, with pleasure, for you love me, and we have been happy together; and later perhaps—I don't know, I am very foolish, and neither you nor baby will ever

really want me. I am not fit to be your wife, or his mother. I did not think of this before; and were I to get well, all these thoughts would pass away and leave me just what I was. So it is better I should go."

In this solemn moment, already standing on the confines of eternity, the weak mind grasped what a long life of experience would not have taught her, and what returning life would blot out of her memory—the great lesson of *responsibility*!

There was a long pause; he thought that she had done speaking—that he had listened to her last words—that she would never speak to him again; and he sat on, stunned and paralysed, not looking at her, but straight before him with a dull vacant gaze.

After a time she went on, but in a lower, weaker voice, "You must never regret taking me from Aunt Deborah, for I should have died there; when the cold winter winds set in I should have died, and that would have been so sad; it is so much easier to die when you are happy, just as it is easier to sleep after a happy day than after a dull and miserable one. It was very kind of you to marry me, and you have been very good to me ever since, and there is nothing to regret. You will be glad to have baby when I am gone—and you will sometimes speak of me to him—and you will teach him to be good and great; he will learn it all much better from you, for I know that I am very foolish, and that I could never do my duty, or make you and baby really happy. I don't think that was all I had to say, but I feel so tired: good night, dear."

She heaved a deep sigh of ineffable weariness and content, and closed her eyes. Would they never again unclose? Was she dying? was she dead? Could her face look more white and still when he had put her away from out of his arms and buried her far down out of sight, as he had seen others buried out of the sight of those who loved them. She was so young, so beautiful, so beloved! But others were young and beautiful and beloved too, and he had seen them lying dead and

coffined; why should death spare her? Who spoke of faith being stronger than love!—has it not often proved stronger than death itself? James Cameron had done all that love and skill could do to save her, and now as her heart beat fainter and fainter beneath his encircling arm, he tried the power of faith. Her life should be given him in answer to his prayer. He had never yet prayed for a blessing upon his life; he had fearlessly accepted it at God's hands, and had borne in silence whatever of suffering had been laid upon it. He had not prayed for the poor little sister he had loved so dearly, because he did not then know that life had joys which made it worth the living. It was Winifred who had first taught him this—his child-wife, who had crept into his heart and life, God alone knew how or why: and was she to be taken from him now when they were so happy, and when a great sorrow as a great joy had drawn them so close to one another?

These, and other thoughts too sacred to be put into words, passed through the doctor's mind, and they were followed by a prayer—such a prayer as had never gone up from his heart before! It consisted of but few words—it needed but a few to ask for her life; and there were no additions, no vows, no protestations—not even the cry of submission, “Thy will be done!” He asked for her to be spared to him, and to his life; then drawing his arms closer around her, wrapping her away altogether in his great love, he waited.

And his prayer was granted. Well would it have been if it had not been so,—if he had left this, as, every other event of his life, in the hands of God,—if he had seen with the prophet-eyes of the dying wife and mother. Surely he would then have echoed her words, that it was best that she should go then, when they were happy, and he would have pleasure in the thought of her. But he had not prayed for happiness; he had only prayed for her life, to have the blue eyes unclosed once more and smile up at him, to have her hand lie warm with beating pulse in his, to see that awful shadow pass from

her face, to have her as she was before it fell. And his prayer was granted. Nurse had stolen softly in, the baby in her arms. It was quiet now—after long fretting she had hushed it to sleep; but at the opening of the door it awoke and cried. Faint as the cry was, it awoke the mother; the great eyes opened wide, and she stretched out her arms, "Give it me, nurse!"

It was laid once more in her lap, and she held it to her breast, and then she looked up at her husband and smiled.

So his prayer was granted; and the awful shadow passed away from her face, and from his life too, he fondly hoped and believed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"HERE we are, Miss."

The conductor whistled, and Ruth was left standing in the middle of the street, looking ruefully down at her bespattered gown, and wondering vaguely how she should ever reach the opposite side: two days of almost incessant rain having made the streets impassable, as London streets alone can be. It is said that "where there's a will there's a way," and a way Ruth found, though not a crossing, and reached the opposite pavement with less detriment than might have been expected to her neat little boots.

The street and house of which she was in search were soon found. The door stood invitingly open, and among the brass-plates lining the wall on either side of the narrow passage, she saw one devoted to "Mrs. Roper, Governess Agency." Yes, that was it. And the brass-plate further informed her that Mrs. Roper's hours were from ten to five. But how was the respected lady to be got at? There was only one bell and a knocker; it was difficult, therefore, to decide to which of the brass-plates they individually belonged. Ruth tried the bell at a

venture; it sent a resounding peal through the house, and at the same moment an ominous face appeared in the dim distance of the passage.

"Who's there?"

"I beg your pardon, does Mrs. Roper——"

"That ain't her bell!" and the head disappeared.

Ruth stood awhile irresolute, then tried the knocker; there was no response. She waited patiently for what seemed to her an age, with that cold draught blowing down the passage; then knocked again, louder and more boldly. Heavy steps were heard approaching, a door close to which she was standing opened violently, and she actually started on seeing the same ominous face glaring at her from its threshold!

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she stammered, but the door was banged in her face, and the heavy steps retreated; long, however, after their echo had died away, she could still hear the distant mutterings of the storm she had invoked.

What was to be done now?

A cab stood outside, and on the box a cabman reading a radical paper; having deferred his help as long as possible, as is the general way with us Englishmen, he came to the rescue.

"If it's Roper's Agency you're looking for, it's upstairs, third floor, first door to the right."

Upstairs Ruth went, and there found the brass-plate repeated. Her heart gave a little nervous leap as in answer to her timid knock, a loud peremptory voice bade her,—

"Come in."

Having done so, she found herself in the presence of three ladies, all presiding at a large official-looking table covered with papers. The first of these ladies, who, if she filled her post as well as she did the arm-chair—to which she alone of the three seemed entitled—must have been a most weighty member of society, was resplendent in a rich brocaded gown, and a head-gear whose wealth of jet and pearl ornaments added in no slight degree to

her imposing appearance. This was Mrs. Roper, the presiding power.

The second lady, tall and thin—very tall and very thin—sinister browed, and moustachioed, with a loud interrogatory voice, and sharp off-hand manner, was Mrs. Roper's niece, and—the active power.

The third lady, small and spare, with mild watery eyes, and a nervous deprecating manner, was Miss Ruffit—the long-suffering and all-suffering power.

"Be seated," said the Active Power, as Ruth advanced to the table. "Your name?"

"Ruth Edgestone."

"Requirements?"

"Daily teaching."

"Age?"

"Twenty."

"Hem—very young for a daily teacher. Better say four-and-twenty, you would get a much higher salary."

"Thank you. I should prefer stating everything just as it is."

"Of course," was the grim answer, "it's always with the age I have more trouble than with anything else. Fill up that form, if you please."

And she pushed a printed paper towards Ruth, and dipped a pen in ink.

There are certain things that produce the uncomfortable sensation of a bucket of cold water down the back—the printed form had this unpleasant result for Ruth Edgestone. One glance! and she sat appalled at her own ignorance. Little had she dreamt of what was expected of a candidate to Mrs. Roper's patronage. Every accomplishment, ancient and modern; every language, dead and alive; all the arts and sciences. Oh! why had she not stuck to the little butchers and bakers round Elysium Terrace? why had she thus dared present herself before a fashionable West-end agent?

Perhaps the Active Power noticed her hesitation, and suspected her of a conscience, for she observed, sharply,—

"I must trouble you to begin, for we have other claimants on our time."

Then, as she still hesitated, looking doubtful and troubled, she transferred the form from her to Miss Ruffit, with the words,—

"Please to fill it up."

Miss Ruffit, was general scribe; she wrote a fine Italian hand, and was useful in copying the forms of those candidates who did not, for parents are particular about caligraphy.

The first page was soon filled up, satisfactorily, and without question; an intimate acquaintance with all the sciences, being taken as a matter of course. Then the Active Power asked,—

"Do you undertake French?"

"Yes, grammatically at least; I spoke it as a child, but have had little practice since then."

"Ever been to France?"

"Only once for three months, many years ago."

(Active Power, turning to Miss Ruffit.) "Write, French grammatical and conversational, acquired in the country."

"Oh, but indeed——"

No notice was taken of the interruption.

"And German?" continued the Active Power.

"I learnt it at school, but was never in the country, and——"

"Mrs. Roper was, many years, and answers for the proficiency of her candidates."

"But I am not proficient, and should not like to undertake it."

"Proficiency is quite unnecessary." (To Miss Ruffit.)

"Write German, its grammar and literature."

"But, indeed——"

Miss Ruffit only obeyed one power, and wrote.

"What comes next?"

"Italian."

"I know nothing of Italian." This was said very decidedly.

"But it reads well on the form, and as you only

undertake young children, you may never have to teach it—if you have, you can take lessons. Write, the rudiments. I suppose you don't know Latin? No? Then only write the rudiments of that too."

Ruth was too much amazed to offer any further objections; she next found herself raised to the highest rank of musical geniuses, and possessed of a hundred other mushroom accomplishments, that had sprung up spontaneously, she knew not how, and which filled her with confusion and dismay.

The four pages thus satisfactorily filled up, and signed with her name and address, she was requested to lay down five shillings, and was conducted by Miss Ruffit into an adjoining room, there to await a list of houses at which she would be allowed to call, together with half a hundred other candidates.

The room into which she was shown, and which was already so full of forlorn, dejected looking females that there only remained one vacant chair, was about as dreary an apartment as could have been chosen, overlooking long rows of blackened chimneys, over which hung the leaden pall of the rain-weighted sky. Everything within was in keeping with the view without. On the dull damp looking walls hung a monster calendar and a number of monster texts, ranged at equal distances. On the table were "Fox's Martyrs," and an old musty volume of "Blair's Sermons." All pretence at colour had long since faded out of carpet and curtains; all idea of comfort had been carefully excluded from the horse-hair sofa and chairs—everything had the dead-alive look that characterised the dust-covered flies, buzzing drearily on the dim glass of the window, by which stood the one vacant chair.

Having claimed it, Ruth glanced round the room, and the first group on which her eye rested made her heart ache. Seated on the horse-hair sofa she saw two sisters—yes, certainly sisters, although the one was what might be called an old maid, with a grave faded face, and hair already streaked with grey; whilst the other was still

young, with dewy lips, and eyes that, though clouded now, were full of life, and hope, and love. They were dressed in deep mourning, and there were dark rings round their eyes, that told of much bitter weeping. Were they going forth now for the first time? were they about to be parted?—that they nestled up so close to each other. They did not speak, not even in a whisper, but from time to time they exchanged a wistful smile, and Ruth fancied that they sat hand in hand—but of this she could not be sure.

Something in the younger sister's face reminded her of Miriam—Miriam, as she had seen her in the old days of drudgery, not as she had seen her last.

A sour-visaged, toil-worn candidate, who happened just then to be staring blankly at Ruth, saw a warm light steal into the eyes that were looking out upon the dreary prospect of blackened chimneys; and she wondered, almost resentfully, what anyone in that room could possibly find to smile at.

“How pretty Miriam had looked—with her rosy cheeks and radinat, laughing eyes—so proud of the silks and velvets, the miniature watch, and gleaming rings, that were still prized, because still a novelty.”

The smile in Ruth's eyes brightened and glowed, and the sour-visaged candidate turned her back upon her.

Ruth's thoughts passed on from Miriam to the friend to whom Miriam owed all her happiness; and she sighed to think how long it was since she had seen him—nearly two months! Yes, it was nearly two months since she had read in the *Times* the birth of his child, and she had not seen him since. How strange that up to that time she had never realised the possibility of his being a married man, always picturing him alone with the grim old housekeeper, and the memory of the little dead sister. Very tenderly Ruth thought of the young wife and the little child, who must be so dear to him. Very tenderly she was thinking of them now; but something of sadness must have mixed with the thought, for she sighed, and her sigh was echoed by some one near.

She started. She had forgotten place and hour; and looking hastily round, she saw, for the first time, a figure seated at the opposite window, and looking out, like herself, upon the waste of chimney-pots, and yet more dreary waste of dull, grey sky beyond.

Ruth's attention was at once arrested, for—with the keen appreciation of beauty possessed by those to whom the gift has been denied—she saw at a glance that the stranger was beautiful,—not with the beauty of feature, but from a certain dark grandeur of outline not unlike that of the Egyptian sphinx. Low-browed and somewhat massive in form, with every line clearly and strongly marked; with its frame of midnight hair heavy and shadowless, and lighted by a pair of eyes whose depth of colour and expression seemed, by a certain magnetism, to draw in and absorb whatever they looked upon without betraying anything of the soul within, that they guarded rather than reflected—it was a face that at once commanded attention, if not admiration; and once seen, was not easily forgotten. Her figure, too, was both grand and graceful; and there was in her whole attitude a depth of abstraction as striking as it was unconscious. Instinctively Ruth felt that that woman—whoever or whatever she might be, good or bad, superior or inferior—was altogether different from the ordinary run of people with whom we are thrown in our daily life. Some subtle power—felt, though scarcely recognised—at the first glance set her apart from them; and this power it was that imparted to her dark, inscrutable face so strange an interest.

Ruth was fascinated, and was watching her still, when the door opened, and Miss Ruffit's weak eyes and smile appeared at the opening; and Miss Ruffit's weak, deprecating voice summoned one of the candidates. Then she stepped up to the motionless figure in the window. "If you please, Miss Drugh," she said, hesitatingly; but the figure did not move.

Miss Ruffit coughed—then sneezed; but as neither cough nor sneeze had the desired effect, she went close

up to the stranger she had called Miss Drugh, and, pitching her voice to its highest key, repeated once more her name.

Slowly, and apparently with an effort, Miss Drugh withdrew her eyes from the chimney-pots, and they fell—not on Miss Ruffit, but on Ruth, who, ashamed of being caught, averted her glance at once.

“Did you speak to me?” asked Miss Drugh of Miss Ruffit.

The words were simple enough; but the voice Ruth thought, was the richest and sweetest she had ever heard.

Poor little Miss Ruffit confessed to the charge of having addressed her, in tones as deprecating as if she had been confessing to some intentional wrong.

“Mrs. Roper,” she said, “had sent her to tell Miss Drugh that Lady Mountjoy had neither called nor sent, as she had promised to do. Perhaps her ladyship had not come up to town, after all. Would Miss Drugh call in again to-morrow?”

“That is quite impossible,” said the same low, rich voice; “and, besides, I have changed my mind—I shall stay in London.”

“Oh,—but,—indeed,” pleaded poor little Miss Ruffit, nervous and apprehensive, “Mrs. Roper so counted on you, and Lady Mountjoy——”

“Will no doubt find a substitute among Mrs. Roper’s eligible candidates.”

“Oh dear—oh dear!” sighed the all-suffering power; “and Mrs. Roper gave you the first chance, and Lady Mountjoy. . . . Won’t you just step in and speak to Mrs. Roper yourself?”

“Thank you, no; you can let her know my decision.”

She rose and left the room, with the quiet ease and self-possession of one utterly unconscious of being an object of notice.

Ruth’s eyes involuntarily followed her, so did those of Miss Ruffit.

“Such a pity, to be sure!” she sighed, regretfully.

"Such an offer!—all the comforts of a home; and such a home as old Lady Mountjoy's for two hours' music in the evening! Well—well! there is no satisfying some people."

Then she turned to Ruth and remitted her an address.

Ruth read:—

"MRS. RIVERS, Pembroke Villa, St. John's Wood.

"Requirements: English, in all its branches; superior music, vocal and instrumental; French, German, and Italian; drawing; plain and fancy needlework. Good method and great evenness of temper indispensable. Hours from nine to one. Seven children, ages varying from five to sixteen. Terms, ten shillings a week!"

A journey to St. John's Wood and four hours' drudgery for ten shillings a week! Ruth coloured slightly, but she said nothing; her one anxiety now being to get away.

And this was the end of the many bright hopes she had centred in the London agent. Daily teaching was apparently to prove as difficult a matter as apartment letting, for the card still hung in the drawing-room window. One lodger, and only one, had Ruth had—a pretty, soft young woman (who looked little more than a child), by name Mrs. Lovelace, whose husband, she said, was a sailor, which fact quite accounted in Ruth's eyes for the bitter tears she found her shedding night after night over her baby's cradle; for Mrs. Lovelace had a baby, which, strange to say, Ruth did not consider an objection. On the contrary, her heart warmed to both mother and child; and she was beginning to feel something very like affection for both, when the curate's wife calling, looked mysterious, and said, "My dear, where is the husband?" and echo alone answered—"Where!"—for though the poor little mother had answered all Ruth's general questions readily enough, she broke down altogether before the older lady's sharp interrogatory.

So she was obliged to leave, and she wept more bitterly than ever; and Ruth wept for sympathy, and kissed and soothed her, and told her how sorry she was to lose her, and wished, as she saw her drive off with the sleeping baby gathered to her breast, that she were a nice, comfortable, independent old maid, who, having no reputation to care about, might have kept the pretty little woman and her child until the sailor-lover came home and made all straight.

Mrs. Lovelace gone, no lodger replaced her; the card still hung in the window; and though Ruth told Aunt Emily and Miriam that she was getting on nicely, her heart sank more than once at the thought of the coming month when her rent would be due; and how was she to meet it? It was of this she was thinking as she passed out into the street.

The rain, which had kept off during the morning, had now set in, in right good earnest—cold, dripping, and pitiless. Ruth opened her umbrella; but before hiding herself altogether beneath its shelter, she cast a last look down the street. It was entirely deserted, save for one solitary figure at some distance, proceeding at a pace as slow and leisurely, as if walking beneath sunny skies, or, at least, beneath the shelter of an umbrella. Ruth recognised it at once—it was the dark-browed stranger of Mrs. Roper's waiting-room. Could she catch her up? Perhaps; she would try. And, hurrying on, she had soon gained the stranger's side.

"I beg your pardon," she gasped, quite out of breath.

Miss Drugh stopped short, looking more surprised than pleased at this interruption.

"I beg your pardon," repeated Ruth; "but will you let me share my umbrella with you? It is raining so heavily, and you will be wet through."

"Thank you; I shall find a cab or omnibus at the end of the street."

And, bowing slightly, she passed on.

But Ruth persisted. Miss Drugh again refused, then yielded; and Ruth walked on at her side, glad to be of

use, and not disturbing by a word the brown study into which her companion had fallen.

At last, the high road gained, both stopped short.

"Thank you, that is my omnibus."

It happened to be Ruth's omnibus also, so both got in together, and were both set down at the same point. It was still raining, more pitilessly than ever. Miss Drugh inquired the nearest way to Arlington Street. The conductor grumbled out some unintelligible words, and drove off.

Ruth knew the street, and gave the needful directions, adding, however, at the same time, that it was a good ten minutes' walk.

Miss Drugh looked round for a cab, but in vain; and Ruth, nothing daunted by the ungracious manner in which her aid had before been rejected, offered it once more.

"I am just home," she said. "That is my house which you must pass on your way to Arlington Street. If you would take my umbrella——"

And she proceeded to press her offer;—the more earnestly, the more coldly it was refused. Not only her words pleaded, but her voice and looks; and she was so evidently distressed, that her companion at last yielded as before—rather, it would seem, to put an end to her importunities, than with any wish to avail herself of the proffered accommodation.

"You are too kind," she said, with an ironical inflexion of the rich voice. "It is said that the greatest proof that can be given of trust in human nature is to lend a *friend* an umbrella, and this confidence you extend to a perfect stranger. I thank you."

Ruth, from the shelter of the little porch, watched her strange acquaintance down the street; and though on entering the house she found both Jane and the kitchen fire out, and no signs of the tea she had fondly hoped was awaiting her, there was a warm glow at her heart that made her indifferent to both cold and hunger.

Several times during that evening she thought of her

dark ungracious companion; and at night she strangely mingled in her dreams. She had received a letter from her, a long letter closely written; but as she attempted to decipher it, she saw that the characters were still wet, Surprised, she passed her hand over them, and dropped the letter with a cry—her hand was smeared with blood. Awakening, with a start, she found that it was broad daylight.

Ruth was not in the least superstitious. On awaking she had found herself lying on her back—the dream was a nightmare, nothing more; and she dismissed it from her mind.

The morning's post brought her another list of houses at which she was requested to call as soon as possible, as there were many candidates.

That afternoon she knocked at half-a-dozen doors, and was tormented with a hundred impertinent questions; and returned home at dusk, weary and dejected, and with the pleasant conviction that she would have done much better to have stayed quietly at home.

"If you please, miss," said Jane, "there's a strange lady in the drawing-room."

"A strange lady! what's her name?"

"I'm sure I don't know, miss. I thought as how she'd come to look at the rooms, and I showed them her, but she didn't look like taking them, and I don't think it was for that she came; but she said she'd wait."

A strange lady! Ruth's heart died within her; she had seen so many strange ladies that day (and very strange some of them were) that she was heartily sick of them, and it was with lingering, reluctant steps that she proceeded to the drawing-room.

The door stood ajar, and she entered unheard. The room lay in complete shadow—the figure of the visitor seated at the further window was itself but a shadow, darker, though more palpable, than the rest. The features she could not distinguish; she could but see their outline rising white and clear from out of the surrounding twilight. In the attitude rather than in anything else she recognised

it at once, with a feeling of intense relief. It was Miss Drugh, come to return her the umbrella.

Fearing to startle her by too silent an approach, she played with the handle of the door; the white face, half lost amid the shadows, turned slowly towards her. The visitor rose.

"I must apologise for this intrusion, Miss Edgestone," she began, but Ruth interrupted her.

"It was so kind of you to call yourself," she said; "and to wait for me, too. I hope you have not been here very long?"

"I hardly know; I am a bad judge of time." She paused, and seemed to hesitate, then said abruptly, "You have two rooms to let, Miss Edgestone; I should like to take them. May I?"

Ruth was so taken by surprise that she did not immediately answer. At last she stammered out, "You have seen the rooms?"

"Yes, I have seen and heard all, and am quite satisfied. I will leave you my address; when you have thought over my offer, you will perhaps let me know your decision."

But Ruth, whose faith in her fellow creatures was unbounded, spite of many a bitter experience, and who, moreover, well knew that a day's reflection would certainly not lead her to refuse a lodger, accepted the offer at once, and without hesitation.

Half-a-dozen more words, and all was settled. Miss Drugh was to enter next day, and Ruth, scarce recovered from her first surprise, stood at the window, watching her new lodger pass slowly down the garden.

Was she glad? She hardly knew, at present all was bewilderment. There are certain events in life that strike one with a sense of unreality, and this was one. The strange impression that Miss Drugh had from the first made upon her, her connection with that night's dreams, the sudden way in which all had been arranged, bewildered her. She had no doubts or misgivings as to the wisdom of her hasty decision, but she regretted that

the darkness of the room had prevented her having a good look in the stranger's face and right down into the lustrous eyes—for Ruth always liked to meet the full, direct glance of those she had to trust.

With the sense of unreality ever deepening upon her, she watched the receding figure until, dark and silent as the phantom of a dream, it had passed away.

And thus it came to pass that Caroline Drugh became an inmate in the house of Ruth Edgestone, which simple fact led to many a result of which neither dreamt.

CHAPTER XIX.

AGAIN and again had Mrs. Leigh, with much warmth and cordiality, renewed to Ruth her offer of help; and more than once, though with less warmth, had she repeated her willingness to adopt her, as she had done the younger sister, but Ruth steadily refused both offers. Aunt Emily fumed, Miriam coaxed and entreated; Ruth stood firm. Her aunt, she well knew, only spoke from duty, and Miriam was quite happy without her: she was not wanted.

How Ruth contrived to live was an enigma that Mrs. Leigh never tried to solve. She kept a roof above her head, a servant to open to visitors, she was always neatly dressed, and never complained; she must, therefore, be getting on, as she herself declared—nicely; and so the warm-hearted but worldly aunt, not caring to inquire into things too closely, took her word for it that she wanted for nothing, and ceased at last to offer help that was so persistently rejected.

Mrs. Leigh was of those who cannot have two affections at once; with her it was all or nothing. Her first love she had given whole and undivided to her sister Miriam; disappointed in her, she had looked about for a new object on which to centre all her affection, and she had found the General. He was both father and husband to

her. As long as he was her adoring slave she loved but tyrannised over him; when, stricken with paralysis, he became helpless and exacting, she adored him, and devoted to him more years of patient watching and nursing than he had given her of gaiety and splendour. Such is woman! After his death, finding no new love strong enough to content her, she had fallen back upon herself, and had loved herself exclusively; the result of this was nerves, hypochondria, and spleen. Her heart had for years been dead to all love, all sympathy; now, with its newly found affection, it revived. In loving Miriam with an exclusive love her interest in mankind in general awoke once more, she enjoyed a second youth, as warm, though more subdued, than the first. It would have been quite impossible for her to love both sisters; but while petting and spoiling the one, she did not altogether neglect the other. When she had nothing better to do, and wanted a drive, she called to see her, and on all such occasions Miriam of course accompanied her, and was even sometimes allowed to stay the evening, but not often, for Aunt Emily hated to be alone, and felt quite lost without her little companion.

One day, about a week after Caroline Drugh's installation at No. 3, Elysium Terrace, Aunt Emily called. She had been making a round of visits, and half her acquaintance not being at home, she had a couple of hours to spare before her seven o'clock dinner.

Ruth welcomed them as usual with smiles, and listened for more than an hour to their animated talk about ball, concert, and opera, the last fashion, the last speech and novel. It was really pleasant to have so interested and attentive a listener. Aunt Emily had much to say about Miriam, and Miriam had much to say about herself; and so they talked on for more than an hour, during which time neither had remembered to ask about that which, to Ruth, was of such vital importance—the letting of her rooms. And this, not because they were indifferent, but simply because other things touching them more nearly, just then, engrossed their attention.

Ruth did not resent, or even notice, the omission. In listening to their news she had forgotten her own; when she remembered, she imparted it.

Miriam was delighted, and asked a thousand eager, foolish questions.

Mrs. Leigh, who thought the letting of rooms by a young, simple girl, a very serious matter, looked grave, and exacted full particulars.

"Young, handsome, and apparently friendless," she repeated, shaking her head. "I hope, Ruth, that you had references?"

"Oh, yes; an excellent reference to a clergyman. She insisted upon my writing, and the answer was most satisfactory,"

Mrs. Leigh read the note, found out the referee, saw that he was a rector, and that his living was valued at 600*l.* a-year, and was silenced on the score of respectability.

"But are you sure of your money?" she next asked.

"Miss Drugh paid a month in advance. She says it is her invariable rule."

"And is she a pleasant lodger?"

"Indeed she is," answered Ruth, warmly. "So quiet, so ladylike; she asks for nothing, and seems satisfied with all."

"Do you see much of her?"

"Oh, no; very little. I do not like to intrude, and she discourages all advances. Perhaps it is only her manner, but she seems proud and reserved. And yet," added Ruth, with a half sigh, "I sometimes so wish I could be of use to her; I fear that she is dull and sad, living so completely alone."

"Dreadfully dull, I should think," said Aunt Emily, with a shudder of commiseration, as she thought of the mean little room, the dull look out, the silence, the solitude. "What does she do all day?"

"I hardly know. I never hear her but of an evening, when she sings. She has her own piano, and sings at it for hours. I am no judge of music, I know, but when

I heard her for the first time I seemed to have entered another world, her voice quite bewildered me; sometimes wild and passionate, then again so deep and tender—I never heard such a voice. The other evening I found Jane crying on the stairs as if her heart would break; I thought something terrible had happened, for she never cries, but she said it was only Miss Drugh's singing, and she couldn't help it, it made her think of her mother."

"A professional, perhaps," suggested Aunt Emily; "a public singer?"

"Oh, no; she has no friends, and is always at home in the evening."

"A music mistress, then?" This was said more coldly, it being such a very commonplace conclusion to arrive at.

"I think not; she goes out but little, and at irregular hours."

Mrs. Leigh had nothing further to ask, and relapsed into speculative silence.

The short winter's day had long since closed in, and, though the fire burnt bright, the room lay in partial shadow. Ruth waited till her visitors were gone, to light the lamp.

"I wish I could hear your siren," said Aunt Emily, at last, tired of saying nothing.

"Perhaps you may; it is generally at this hour she begins, when she is at home, which she is now, for I hear her walking up and down."

Aunt Emily heard nothing nor did Miriam; but Ruth had listened day after day, with an aching heart, to those restless paces, sometimes prolonged for hours, and could not be mistaken. "Now she is opening the piano," she said again. "Hark!"

There was a dead silence in the room, all were listening.

Meanwhile Caroline, unconscious of the eager listeners below, ran her fingers lightly over the notes, played a few bars of some dreamy German air, broke off in the

midst, let her hands fall idly in her lap, and sat some moments with drooping head low bowed, and thoughtful.

When at last she sang, it was as if to herself,—faint, uncertain snatches of melody, a few sweet tremulous tones dying away on the listening soul, before the listening ear could seize them; then, as if breaking forth from some restraining power, swelling out into rich volumes of sound, wild, passionate, thrilling! Again she broke off suddenly: rose, went to the window, opened it, shivered as the cold night air struck her, closed it, and resumed her seat.

When she next sang, it was softly, sadly, lingeringly. If before she had poured forth the passionate longings of her soul, she now breathed the no less passionate regrets of her heart; and if its voice was more subdued, it was because it had buried what her soul, being immortal, still retained—hope. As long as that lives we writhe, we agonise; but the dead fold their hands over their breast, and smile—it is thus they meet the Irrevocable. Caroline Drugh's soul still burnt and suffered, but her heart was dead, or at least she deemed it so, and therefore its voice, when it spoke, was calm and hushed as the smile of the dead.

Not once during all this time had the silence been broken in the room below. At first, spell-bound and entranced, her hearers had long since passed quietly and unconsciously from reality into dream-land,—Aunt Emily to dream of the past, Miriam of the future, Ruth of the ideal, that inner and more poetic life, of whose existence none knew, save herself and God, to whom she at times poured forth her heart as well as her soul.

"How beautiful!" at last breathed Miriam, in a soft undertone. She was nearer to earth than the others, and awoke first.

Mrs. Leigh, who never took things quietly, jumped up with no little impetuosity.

"Ruth, I must know that girl; such a gift must not be lost to the world. I will take her in hand, and make

her fortune. You must bring her to me. Do you hear, child?"

"I will try, Aunt; but——"

"Nonsense! there are no buts in the case. I tell you it is a shame for such a splendid gift to be wasted. Bring her to me, and I will make her fortune. She won't be the first who owes her career to me. A wonderful voice certainly!"

Aunt Emily and Miriam gone, Ruth lit the lamp, and busied herself awhile with household matters. Miss Drugh sang no more that evening. For an hour or so Ruth heard her pacing to and fro, then all was still. She is gone to her bed-room, she thought.

As she went up to bed she paused at the drawing-room door. Miriam had brought her a beautiful winter nosegay. She loved flowers dearly, more especially in winter, but no doubt her lodger loved them too. She would place them on the little table in the window, and Miss Drugh would find them there next day. Very softly she entered; the fire burnt low, the room was in almost total darkness. She stole across the carpet, placed the nosegay in the window, and was retiring, when she heard herself addressed,—“Miss Edgestone, is that you?"

She stammered violently and felt guilty of intrusion; she apologised—the darkness of the room had prevented her seeing its occupant, who sat in a half crouching attitude on a low stool before the fire, her elbows on her knees, her chin supported on her clasped hands.

“The candles burnt down and went out,” she said, “and I did not care to move just yet. Is it late?"

“It has just struck ten.”

“Only! Then, if you are not sleepy, would you sit with me a little. I am so tired of being alone.”

Ruth was no less surprised at the request, than at the gentle, almost pleading tone in which it was proffered. It affected her strangely. How often had she longed to break through the ice of reserve that made every advance so difficult. She wished to say something—some-

thing kind and friendly, that would prove to Miss Drugh how anxious she was to serve her; but as she found this impossible, she simply did as she was asked, and having lighted fresh candles and made up the fire, she came and sat down by it. "You did not sing long to-night," she said, by way of opening the conversation.

"No, I have one of my restless fits on me. I could not sing, I could not read, I could not even think; were I to go to bed I could not sleep. Have you never felt this, that seems like the presentiment of some coming event, that makes you listen, and 'start at every sound, a state of restless expectation that prevents your doing anything. You sometimes feel this before a storm. I feel it to-night."

"I think you are too much alone," Ruth ventured to say, "solitude breeds all sorts of strange feelings and fancies; I know this from experience for when my sister Miriam was with me I did not know what nerves were, and now that she is gone I often feel dull and nervous."

"You have a sister then—a married sister?"

Miss Drugh seemed hardly interested; perhaps to draw off her mind from one predominant train of thought she was forcing herself to be amused. Ruth paused; little as her companion had sought either her society or confidence, cold and even repellant as had hitherto been her manner, she felt instinctively drawn towards her; she admired, she pitied, she wished to serve her. There is nothing like giving confidence to gain it. This Ruth knew, yet naturally reserved, and as Aunt Emily called it, *shut-up*, she shrank from speaking to a stranger of herself or her concerns.

"I did not know you had a sister. I should like to hear about her." Miss Drugh still spoke in the same low gentle tone, and Ruth told her all, not only about Miriam, but of their early happy home—the dead mother—the disappointed artist-father—the orphans' loneliness, destitution, and long years of patient, unwearying toil. But of all this she spoke without bitterness or repining,

with moist eyes but smiling lips, and Caroline felt to the depths of her darkened soul that the girl's faith and love were truth.

Ruth next told of Miriam's illness and her own despair; of the terrible struggle between life and death, of the strange doctor's skill and kindness (she did not mention his name), of the desertion of friends and scholars, of the poor invalid's longing for change of air, and the almost miraculous payment of the old debt, of Aunt Emily's sudden appearance and its results. There ended her narrative. Miriam was provided for, was rich in all that makes life beautiful. She had nothing more to tell.

It was a simple story, simply told. Miriam—Aunt Emily—the doctor, were by turns its hero or heroine as the case might be—she herself—never. Her companion had risen and was again pacing the room, but more calmly, and with an expression of subdued and gentle thought that softened every line of the dark, stormy countenance. She had for the time forgotten herself in another.

Ruth stooping to replace a fallen cinder, felt a light hand on her shoulder, and looking up she found the opportunity she had so long desired of looking straight down into the dark eyes, and as she did so, she wondered at their inscrutable depth of expression. Was it the hand of angel or demon that had troubled the deep wells of thought into which she looked half shuddering? Was it heaven or hell she saw reflected there?

"You have a noble, generous heart," said Caroline, speaking softly, almost humbly, "I could not feel as you do."

"How?"

"If the sister I loved, the aunt who had for years neglected me, the doctor whom gratitude compelled me to respect, had all conspired to wrong me, I could not feel as you do."

"Oh, yes, you would," said Ruth, with simple earnestness, "if you had watched through hours of sickening

agony and suspense, the deathbed of one whose life was dearer to you than your own, and felt how powerless were all your love and care to save her: if you had owed to charity the medical aid, without which she would have died; if you had seen her pining and drooping for the fresh air you could not give her, you would bless any one who took the dear life out of the hands that were too weak to hold it."

"And people say love is stronger than death—strong, indeed! It is only strong in suffering, in all else it is weak—miserably, degradingly weak. You loved your sister as we love when we have only the one; she deserted you for a stranger, who robbed you and cheated you with fair words, the only true friend you ever found wronged in trying to help you. I am sick of the world, sick of it to death; turn where you will the innocent suffer; the many have a victim in the one; let the congregation in the camp shout and feast, who thinks of the wretched scapegoat who has gone forth lonely and accursed!"

Caroline Drugh spoke with passionate bitterness, and resumed her seat before the fire.

Ruth was pained, but not shocked. "I have sometimes thought the same," she said, "in reading history, more especially political history; but as Dr. Cameron once said——"

She stopped short, arrested by a low sharp cry that seemed to have been wrung from her companion by some sudden physical anguish. Ruth looking at her saw that she was ghastly white, even to the lips. "You are ill," she said, anxiously.

There was no answer. Ruth brought a glass of water, and kneeling down held it to the livid quivering lips. Miss Drugh pushed it almost angrily from her, then seized it convulsively, drained it at a draught, and drew a long breath.

"I am better now," she said, passing her hand slowly over her eyes. "It is nothing; do not look so frighten-

ed," and she smiled up into Ruth's troubled face. Ruth thought she had never seen so sad and wan a smile.

"It is nothing, I assure you," she repeated, making a violent effort to speak composedly, but her voice came in slow heavy gasps. "If you would fetch my salts from the next room."

Ruth did so. On her return she found Miss Drugh quite herself again; so entirely herself that her fears were allayed, and she believed what she told her, that it was a mere nervous attack to which she was subject, and which accounted for her late restlessness.

"But you will go to bed will you not?" asked Ruth, still a little anxious. But Caroline refused almost vehemently. "Would not Miss Edgestone sit with her a little longer and talk to her, she would be so grateful. She was just going to tell her something that Doctor——"

"Cameron," suggested Ruth.

"Yes, something he had said. Was it he who was so kind and saved your sister's life?"

"Yes, it was he, and she remembered what he had said. 'That it is not for us to try and solve the great problem of wrong, but if possible to repair it.'"

"Ah!"

Ruth paused.

"Well?" said Miss Drugh, in a tone of impatient expectation.

"That was all he said."

"Tell me more about——Dr. Cameron." Her voice faltered just a little in pronouncing the name, but once pronounced it faltered no more. "I like to hear of good people, philanthropists who heal the wrongs of mankind." She spoke in a tone of quiet half careless interest, and Ruth, pleased and flattered, told her all she knew of the man who had saved Miriam's life; and speaking from her heart it was not without a certain simple eloquence. She spoke too of the beautiful young wife and little baby, whom Aunt Emily knew quite well.

Miss Drugh, her face bowed down upon her hand and averted, still questioned further. She had once met a

Dr. Cameron many years ago, it might be the same. What was he like—handsome?”

Ruth smiled. “No, certainly not handsome,—Miriam even says he is ugly; and perhaps he might be, if every feature were not so full of power, and his smile so sweet. No, certainly not handsome,” she repeated decisively, as she recalled his tall gaunt figure, stooping shoulders, and stern rugged face, “and yet bending over Miriam’s sick bed, his face was to me as the face of an angel.”

Miss Drugh seemed at last to have exhausted both questions and interest. Ruth heard her sigh wearily, and rose. As she bade her good night, she took for the first time in hers the hand that had never been offered to her; it was dry and burning, and she felt its every nerve throb and quiver beneath her touch, as if in rebellion at it.

At an earlier stage of their conversation when talking of Aunt Emily, Ruth had mentioned her wish for an introduction, but it had been refused at once, almost haughtily; now, however, her strange companion said abruptly, and without looking up, “I have changed my mind, Miss Edgestone, I think a little society would do me good; when Mrs. Charlton Leigh calls, I shall be glad to see her.”

The words were cold, the tone was colder still; the cloud of reserve had fallen darker—more impenetrable than ever. But Ruth was not discouraged, and went to bed with the pleasant conviction that Aunt Emily would soon coax her strange lodger from her solitude, and then she would smile and look happy like the rest of the world—at least, she hoped so, and of this hope she made a prayer, and fell asleep.

And meanwhile the girl, for whom she prayed, sat as she had left her—white, rigid, motionless, as the dead; trying by pressing her hands over her eyes to shut out the reality of what she had heard, trying to believe it all a dream, a delusion. It was impossible, monstrous, that he, the betrayer of her father, the wretch thrice

accursed, who had blasted her life, and wrecked her soul; who had turned every nobler and gentler feeling into bitterness, who had made of every prayer a curse—should be the friend and benefactor of the house to which she had come by so strange a chance—that the very hand that had clasped her's but now, had clasped his in friendship and in gratitude. And he was near her, he might come at any time—to-morrow; she might see him, hear the voice she had last heard in the condemned cell. She wrung her hands, a sudden terror, a crushing sense of her utter weakness overwhelmed her—her one thought was escape. She had nursed hatred and revenge in her heart for years, and now by a sudden reaction it seemed to have died within her, leaving the soul it had so long tortured cold and dead. The object of her hate and revenge girded around with his good deeds, and the blessings of such simple hearts as Ruth Edgestone rose before her as a giant, unassailable, defiant. In a moment, the impression of years seemed effaced, she no longer hated, she only feared. Bewildered, she began to doubt the reality of the past, and the share he had had in it, and she went groping back, not to condemn, but if possible to excuse.

Let us follow her, and see what that past had really been.

CHAPTER XX.

ONE bitter winter's night, when a blinding snow, a cutting wind, and paralysing cold, had swept the streets of every living thing, whether biped or quadruped, and forced the hardiest and most weather-proof to take shelter, Dr. Westthorpe was told that a stranger lad wished to speak with him.

The doctor sat by the nursery fire with his little one year old child in his arms. Baby had been restless and wakeful, and the father had been very uneasy. Nurse said it was all the cutting of a back tooth, that went

hard in frosty weather; still he was uneasy, for his heart was a very loving one, and he had nothing in the world to love but that wee bit of a thing with the great black eyes, who had cost its mother her life.

Baby had certainly been very troublesome and wilful, and the doctor had had to play with her, talk to her, sing to her, for more than two hours before she would consent to be coaxed to sleep. But she was asleep now, fast asleep, lying back in the strong man's arms, as angel still and smiling, as if she had never been fretful and wayward, and the fire-light played over the darkly-fringed lids and flushed cheeks. She was fast asleep, but he still held her to him, whistling in a soft undertone, and gently rocking her to and fro.

There was a strange magnetic power in those tiny fingers, that had twined themselves about his thumb—it seemed to speak with him. Baby was softly laid in its cradle, each of the waxen lids and dimpled hands was kissed, and Dr. Westthorpe left the room on tiptoe.

He found the stranger in the hall, for the deplorable condition of his cap and boots made the servant shy of introducing him into a room.

He was a tall, rather awkward-looking boy of sixteen, with a bright eagle-glance, rugged features, and a calm, self-assured manner. He did not at once answer the doctor's question as to what he wanted, but he drew together his shaggy brows, pushed from his forehead the heavy masses of straight tawny hair, in which the snow was beginning to melt and considered the questioner for some moments keenly and fixedly; then, as if satisfied with the scrutiny, he spoke freely and fearlessly. He had travelled all the way from Scotland on foot, he had set out with fifteen shillings in his pocket—the money was gone, he had eaten nothing all day, and had not slept for three nights—he was hungry and tired. Would Dr. Westthorpe, to whose door God had guided him, give him food and shelter for the night, and employment for the future? or if not employment, at least money to take

him to London. He would accept it as a charity now, and pay it back as a loan hereafter. If he gave him employment, he would in exchange give him his confidence.

Dr. Westthorpe was pleased with his bold speech and dauntless bearing; he gave him food and shelter, and afterwards, having won his confidence, he gave him employment, and not that only, but instruction, he became his pupil, his assistant, his more than friend—his son. And in return, James Cameron gave him a love as strong and earnest as one heart—and that so true a heart—can give another.

When the wee baby had grown to be a wild, romping, high-spirited child of eight, the only rival her father had in the town, a certain Dr. Lloyd, made up his mind to retire, and sell the good-will of his house and practice. A dashing young surgeon from a neighbouring town, an impudent quack and setter forth of new ideas, moreover, the open enemy of Dr. Westthorpe, bid for them, boasting in no measured terms that once in, he would soon put his antagonist's nose out of joint.

Dr. Westthorpe was alarmed; he had always reckoned upon old Lloyd's retirement to make his fortune, and this new rival—so artful and shameless—was the one of all others to be dreaded. And, unfortunately, he could not outbid him, for being of those easy natures, lavish and hospitable to a fault, he spent on the present all that the present brought in, and sometimes even more.

He consulted James Cameron. "What should he do?"

"Let him do his worst," was the bold answer, "and have the same faith in yourself and your science, as he has in his effrontery."

"But Dr. Westthorpe had not that faith, and besides being a man of strong natural affections, he had also strong hatreds and prejudices. He hated his rival, he knew that the same town could never hold them both, and he was of too pacific a nature not to dread a struggle. Mr. Lloyd's probable successor became his *bête noir*—the skeleton in his cupboard: he had no peace

of his life because of him; he would have given ten years of his existence to get him out of the way.

Dr. Lloyd favoured him; he mistrusted the conceited jackanapes, with his new-fangled notions; but "Every one for himself and God for us all;" his practice was for him who paid for it best.

Dr. Westthorpe had one hope, he applied to the patient who owed to his skill and care not only the last ten years of his life, but every hour of ease he enjoyed.

But he to whom the threescore years and ten had left nothing but the accumulated hoards that his heirs were already squandering away in advance, could not allow himself the indulgence of a generous deed. Dead, he did not scruple to rob his heirs of five thousand pounds wherewith to reward the services of his valued friend and doctor, but living he could not rob himself.

Fatal legacy! paid by both testator and legatee with their lives.

The old man died, but his death was a thing too natural to awaken even a comment; there were only two in the whole town where he had passed from the cradle to the grave, who cared a straw whether he were dead or alive—the one was the undertaker who buried him, the other was his old servant who mourned him. This mourning it was, so unnatural to one who had profited by the old miser's death, he having come in for a legacy of one thousand pounds, that first raised a suspicion; what increased it was the discovery that the legacy had been added by a codicil only two days before the old man's demise. It was the heir who stated the suspicion, and insisted on an inquest. One thousand pounds was worth an inquiry! The inquiry elicited strange facts; the old white-haired servant was arrested, and closer inquiries only tended to implicate him further. Everything and everybody was against him, still he showed neither fear nor anxiety.

"It will all come right in the Lord's good time," was his invariable remark; "the God I have served from my

childhood will not let the innocent suffer for the guilty. Leave it to him. He'll make it all right."

Once only, immediately after his arrest, he betrayed something like emotion, when he asked what Dr. Westthorpe said, and whether he too thought him guilty?

The doctor had taken the matter lightly enough, declaring that the old man was in his dotage, and not responsible for his actions—if he had poisoned his master, it was by mistaking one medicine for another. Further than this he did not interfere.

Old Simmons and James Cameron had always been good friends, partly perhaps from their being countrymen; partly, too, because their principles, and even in many respects their characters, were the same. Old Simmons was infirm—he was also lame; Sunday after Sunday the young doctor might have been seen guiding the old man's feeble steps to the Scotch chapel—stooping his proud head to catch the faint tones of the broken voice, stooping it lower still to receive the blessing of the palsied hand.

When James Cameron heard of his arrest, he made no protest, he said no word in his defence, but he went to him.

"Simmons," he said, "appearances are against you, but I do not trust to appearances. I know that temptation is strong, and you are weak both in mind and body, and the devil knows it too; if you are guilty before man, you are guiltless before God, and He and I will stand by you to the end; if you are innocent, I take the matter into my hand. I am a man of prayer and faith, and I shall prevail to clear you."

The old man's uplifted glance shone calm and steadfast, and he raised his hand with a gesture both of warning and command.

"Leave it to the Lord, Master James," he said, with thrilling earnestness. "Leave it to the Lord, it is not for you to clear the innocent or punish the guilty. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' Have

the same faith in His justice that I have, Master James, and leave it all to Him."

"It is in His name I act," answered the young man, with the proud humility of one undertaking a divine mission. "You are friendless, and man is unjust, the innocent shall not suffer for the guilty. I will bring the murderer to justice, whoever or wherever he may be, and show the same mercy to him that he has shown to your grey hairs. All I ask is your blessing, and your prayers that the Lord may open my eyes."

"Open your eyes!" repeated the old man, with sudden vehemence; "better a thousand times that they closed for ever to the light of day, than that such a prayer should be granted. Oh, boy, boy! you know not what you ask—you know not what you do!"

"The Lord's will."

"His will then be done," said the veteran, humbly; but even while speaking he bowed his head upon his trembling hands, and prayed that the curse of blood might not fall on that devoted life.

Ardent and zealous, throwing his whole soul into whatever he undertook, strong in the protection of God and his old friend's innocence, James Cameron set to work to clear up the ghastly mystery. Silently, with a secrecy and relentless perseverance that would have done credit to an Inquisitor, he prosecuted his search; not for a moment did he waver in his purpose to hunt down the murderer, and clear the innocent.

At last, according to his ceaseless prayer, the Lord opened his eyes. What was his agony on making the awful discovery, that came to him, not gradually and imperceptibly, as it were step by step, a vague suspicion to be seized and followed up, but suddenly—crushingly—as a conviction—a fact—against which there was no appeal. What was the deadly struggle between right and wrong? between the divine law of justice on the one hand, and all the deepest strongest passions of the human heart on the other—pity, love, gratitude, remorse—God alone can tell. He, too, alone knows what

passed between the accuser and the accused; but after the interview, the horror and despair of the latter attracted attention—then suspicion; Dr. Westthorpe was delivered up into the hands of justice, and he whom he called his son was forced to witness against him.

The rest we know; the murderer died, and his denouncer was universally condemned and execrated. Two alone understood and pitied him, the innocent he had cleared, the guilty he had denounced. He knelt at his patron's feet and received his pardon; he knelt at the feet of old Simmons and received his blessing; and the old man, whose eyesight was very dim, did not see that the head upon which his hand was laid—was grey.

The next day James Cameron left D——, he was then just twenty-four.

And what became of the murderer's daughter? She was adopted by an aunt of her mother, whose name she took; a good sort of woman in her way, no doubt, but narrow-minded and bigoted, a zealous chapel-goer, and indefatigable frequenter of prayer-meetings, Bible-meetings, temperance and missionary-meetings, and spiritual tea-meetings.

Miss Drugh was conscientious, and so the child's health and education were duly attended to; but the good lady, whose *spécialité* was respectability, though she never alluded to the dead father, or allowed his name to be mentioned, could neither forget nor forgive the horror and disgrace of his end, and suspecting in the child of such a criminal unfathomable depths of depravity, looked upon her as a soul to be saved, not one to be cherished; and tried by warnings and denunciations, given in season and out of season, to pluck her "as a brand from the burning."

Under such treatment, the warm-hearted impulsive child, whose whole soul spoke out in the ardent eyes, grew cold, silent, and reserved; a veil gathered over the dark features—they spoke no more. But the feelings, the emotions, thus pent up, burnt with an intensity that would strangely have startled the good aunt had she

looked a little deeper. The father she was never allowed to speak of became her one predominant thought—her childish love for him strengthened into a passion; to her he was not a criminal but a martyr, betrayed, forsaken, murdered in cold blood—his crime disappeared before the memory of his great love. She recognised herself (for childhood is quick and clear-sighted), to be an out-cast. She realised that a blight had fallen upon her, that her life was something altogether distinct and apart from the lives of others. But for this she did not blame the guilty father, or the aunt who, however austere, had owned and sheltered her; the whole force of her vengeance, her hate, her resentment, fell on one head only, that of her father's betrayer, whom she had never liked, and of whom at times she had been even jealous. Like the brand of the convict that no after years of repentance and respectability can efface, that one memory burnt into her very soul, and became a part of the silent unuttered bitterness, that made her old before she had reached her teens.

At last Miss Drugh, having attained the longest span allotted to man, fell into ill health, and having been amply repaid for the protection she had extended to the orphan by three years of such patient, unwearied nursing, as is only the result of devoted love, or the gratitude of a proud heart, she died, leaving the niece, who had been universally recognised, as her heir, the sum of 3000*l*. whilst the bulk of her fortune went to build and endow a chapel in some outlandish place, known only to missionary reporters. We do not say that the savages, reported by some eloquent missionary to be invested with tails, and to be the nearest approach to the baboon that has ever been discovered, may not have profited much by the chapel, but half Miss Drugh's large fortune would have sufficed, and the other half might have saved poor Caroline from much wrong and sorrow. Rich, she might have been good;—a noble, generous heart thrives best on prosperity. Rich, we cannot live for ourselves, not entirely, at least; others are, and must be, dependent

upon us. With some, wealth hardens the heart; with others, it softens it,—it would have softened Caroline's.

Or, on the other hand, if left utterly unprovided for, dependent upon her own exertions, she would have had to work, and work would have been salutary; it would have taken her out of her own dark shadow. Highly gifted, ardent, impassioned, she might have become famous. The legacy of 3000*l.* giving her life no aim, affording no necessity for exertion, was her ruin.

It is over this past Caroline Drugh thinks as she sits before the fire, hour after hour, her face buried in her hands. Step by step she traces her onward course from infancy to childhood, from childhood to girlhood, from girlhood to womanhood. She is a woman now, gifted with unusual talents, according to some, with unusual beauty; and what has she of her gifts, her beauty, her womanhood? Does she ask herself that, too?

The hall clock strikes out the hours one by one, the fire dies out, and a death-like cold fills the room; the light of the candles flares up, flickers, and expires, leaving impenetrable darkness behind; but she does not stir,—thought to her is more palpable than cold, darkness, weariness, more real than reality itself.

At last, as the grey dawn steals in, chill and drear, through the lowered blinds, she awakes to a dim consciousness of pain, and raising her wan face she tries to rise, but finds that she is numb and stiff with the cold, and sinks back on her seat with a sigh that is almost a groan. Thus passes another hour; then she rises and paces the room up and down, while from time to time a deadly shiver runs through her exhausted frame. When dawn has brightened into the pale light of an early London morning, when sounds of active life are once more abroad, carts rumbling heavily along, milk cans clattering, and housemaids on door steps, she puts on her bonnet and shawl and goes out.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. LEIGH was at the height of earthly happiness, for she had one absorbing interest and two minor ones. Of these minor interests the one was Caroline Drugh, of the other we shall hear more in another chapter.

Mrs. Leigh called upon Miss Drugh, and was most graciously received—so graciously, indeed, that she quite scolded Ruth for having called her proud and reserved. Nothing, she declared, could have been more graceful, more cordial, than her reception; and then, too, she was so handsome! not a regular beauty, perhaps, but regular beauties were, after all, very insipid.

Encouraged by her unexpected friendliness of manner, she had invited her to dinner, and the invitation had been accepted.

Caroline having spent one evening at Mrs. Leigh's, spent a second, and a third. She was handsome, clever, and agreeable, and she laid herself out to please. She played, sang, and conversed, was alternately grave and gay, always interesting and brilliant. She spoke rapidly, but never eagerly, and when most in earnest she was never animated. She seemed at home upon every subject, playing with it with the grace and, not seldom, the covert cruelty of the cat with the mouse, and then dropping it just as her hearers were becoming interested.

Ruth listened to her conversation as she listened to her singing, with admiration and secret sympathy. By some extraordinary process of reasoning, or rather, perhaps, of instinct, her mind formed a strange connection between the dark, impassioned-looking girl, and the stern, grey, hard-featured doctor; she seemed to recognise a sort of likeness between them, and this she ascribed to the fact that in both, power and individuality were the chief characteristics. Sometimes, even, she caught the same expression on Caroline's face she had seen on that of Dr. Cameron, a shadow dark and still—the reflection,

as it were, of some predominant thought, or memory. Another thing, too, that struck her—for Ruth, speaking little, noticed much—was that she had never seen either laugh, and very seldom smile; when they did so, however, the smile of each was the exact contrast of the other—the one all light, illumining the face like a glory; the other, hiding it behind a glistening veil.

No one but Ruth would ever have found such a likeness between two so entirely dissimilar; and she only felt without analysing it, it was there—and perhaps it deepened the interest with which her singular lodger had from the first inspired her.

Mrs. Leigh, just clever enough to appreciate talent in others, very soon saw that, besides her wonderful voice, Caroline Drugh was no ordinary woman, and, wishing to bring her forward, she tried in every way to rouse her ambition; but in vain. Miss Drugh refused to be patronised, refused to have her fortune made, refused every introduction to members of the high musical world. If she had ambition, she hid it as carefully as she did many another passion. Mrs. Leigh alternately coaxed, scolded, flattered, and blamed; now setting forth the artist's life in its most brilliant, most attractive light; now asking her with indignant sorrow what God had intended in giving her that wondrous gift, that, when great, is the greatest of all, because it speaks as nothing else can to the soul of man? But she spoke in vain, though the dark cheek would sometimes flush and the eye kindle, there was no other response to her enthusiasm.

In another respect, also, Mrs. Leigh was equally unsuccessful, in winning Miss Drugh's confidence. Of the past she never spoke, and there was that in her that inspired an involuntary respect and forbade all questioning.

Mrs. Charlton Leigh had, in her palmy days, been quite noted for her pleasant dinner and evening parties. When she exchanged society for a husband's sick room, she received no more; when she exchanged the sick room for nerves and dyspepsia, she wondered how she

could ever have indulged in such frivolities; but now that she had exchanged nerves for genial companionship, she began to think of those pleasant social gatherings with regret, and, having looked up old friends, and invested in new ones, she ordered a couple of evening dresses for herself and Miriam, and sent out her invitations.

What an acquisition Miss Drugh would be to her ré-unions! She received a general and most pressing invitation; her presence was requested as a favour, and her hostess was gratified to see the sensation she at once created: She was so singular looking, her conversation was so original, and then her singing! There was about her, too, the interest of mystery. Where had she been picked up? how old was she? and why, though not in mourning, did she always wear black?

Upon this latter point Mrs. Leigh had once questioned her, and had been told that it was worn in memory of a very dear friend.

"And would she always wear it?" Miriam had asked, opening her brown eyes very wide.

"Yes, until she found some one that she loved as well."

Mrs. Leigh had smiled, and made out of the simple answer a most interesting romance; the girl's fidelity to the *dear friend* set many a doubt to rest, and accounted for much that was strange and problematic in her conduct.

People like novelty. Mrs. Leigh's guests had never seen anyone like Caroline Drugh, and they made much of her. Had she wished it, she might have become one of the lions of the season; she might have made the round of half the great houses in London, and been quite an idol for the time being; but she did not wish it.

Mrs. Leigh, happening to be confined to the house with a violent cold for some weeks, got the spleen, and became so irritable that Miriam, at her wits' end, proposed their inviting Caroline Drugh to dinner. The remedy was the best she could have suggested, the very sight of a fresh face revived the invalid.

At dinner hostess and guest discussed politics, and disagreed. Mrs. Leigh got animated and vindictive, that gave her an appetite, she ate better than she had done for weeks.

After dinner Miss Drugh caricatured one of Mrs. Leigh's best friends. She laughed heartily, and that helped her digestion, which had for some time been out of order.

She next asked Caroline to sing, which she did without notes. This also was an advantage, as Mrs. Leigh's eyes, always weak, were doubly so now from the effects of the cold, and could only bear the light of a shaded lamp.

"It is strange, but I have never heard you sing a Scotch ballad," she observed, as Caroline ceased, after singing for the second time, a wild Irish melody, which had been rapturously encored, "and yet many of them are so beautiful."

Before Caroline could answer, a loud knock at the street door made the speaker start and exclaim, "A visitor, and at this late hour! Charlie Hartwell or Mr. Thornton, of course, but I cannot see them."

Miriam had run to the window, and was peeping under the blind.

"No; it is a carriage, aunt. I am not quite sure, but I think it is Dr. Cameron's."

"Ah! to be sure. I should have known his knock."

Heavy footsteps were heard ascending the stairs.

"Run, Miriam, dear, to meet him. I shall be glad of an opportunity of introducing you to our dear friend, of whom you have already heard so much," she said, turning to Caroline. "But his time is so precious, we very seldom see him."

While speaking, she had drawn an arm-chair to the fire. Miriam was heard without, talking and laughing in the same breath, the door opened, and a tall, grey-haired man entered the room.

Mrs. Leigh hastened forward to meet him, raining on

him her sweetest smiles and words, as she held his hand in both her own.

"How good of you to come, doctor; how kind! It is an age since I saw you, and I could almost thank this cruel attack of influenza, unpleasant as it is, for bringing you here."

This charming little speech, which was truth and flattery in one, met with neither acknowledgment nor response. As they passed the piano, Mrs. Leigh paused to introduce her new protégée, but that corner of the room being in almost complete shadow, neither could distinguish the other.

Dr. Cameron bowed slightly, and passed on to the fire, sinking into the chair prepared for him, with his back to the piano.

"And how is dear Winifred?" was Mrs. Leigh's first question.

"She is well, thank you."

"And your dear little boy?"

"Well also."

They spoke in a low tone. Caroline half rose and leant forward.

Mrs. Leigh caught the rustle of her silk dress, and said, kindly, "Come here, my dear, nearer to the fire; you must be cold out there." Then, turning to the doctor, "That is Miss Drugh's settled principle, to shroud herself in obscurity; with the finest musical genius and a voice that might gain her world-wide fame, she persists in slighting such gifts as God seldom gives."

"Perhaps she accepts them at His hand as does the nightingale—there are different ways of appreciating God's gifts."

"Ah, of course; I might have known that you would be against me," said Mrs. Leigh, half vexed.

He did not answer, but turned his keen glance towards the distant corner where sat the young musician. Perhaps he wondered why she took no part in the discussion. He could see nothing but the outline of a figure, while the firelight, playing red and warm over

his features, lit them up with almost supernatural brightness. He could not see her, but she saw him—only too well.

“Oh, my God!” she gasped, and a thrill of intense agony shot through her whole being.

“Did you speak, my dear?” asked Mrs. Leigh; and again she urged her to join their circle. Then, as she neither answered nor stirred, she left her in peace, and started another subject of conversation.

And meanwhile Caroline sat on like one oppressed by some hideous nightmare—stunned, paralysed, incapable of either speech or movement; conscious of but one all-absorbing feeling—deadly hatred and repulsion. That one hated presence in the room seemed to poison the very air around her. And yet it was for this meeting she had planned and schemed—had entered Mrs. Leigh’s house, and gained a footing there; and she had schooled herself into calmness, and reasoned herself into the belief that she could meet him as a stranger, and, secure in her incognito, could look him in the face without betraying anything of the concentrated hate of years. And now!—a cold sweat gathered on her brow and about her lips; she pressed her clenched hands to her heart, whose wild beatings seemed, to her fevered fancy, to fill the whole room with sound; the arteries of her temples rose and fell like the heavy stroke of the forger’s hammer; a deadly faintness seized her, her ideas grew confused, the group upon which her fascinated gaze remained fixed, burned into her brain like images of living fire. Mrs. Leigh’s low and not unmusical voice struck her ear with painful discordance, like the crash of broken bells; then—as agony mental or physical can only endure to a certain point—as she saw Mrs. Leigh turn once more towards her, she fell heavily forward, striking her head against the sharp edge of the piano.

When, all, alarmed, reached the spot, they found her lifeless and bleeding, her hands still clenched over her heart, and a look of unutterable suffering darkening over her face.

"Is she dead? oh, doctor, is she dead?" cried Mrs. Leigh, shocked and terrified. And certainly no corpse ever looked more ghastly.

"She has fainted," answered Dr. Cameron, quietly.

Mrs. Leigh was trembling, Miriam had burst into tears; there was that in the still, livid face, with its bleeding wound, that sent a chill through the hearts of both.

James Cameron lifted the young girl in his arms, and carried her to the window, which he opened; then he bathed her temple, moistened her lips, and chafed her cold hands. But her swoon lasted so long that even he at last grew uneasy, and it was with a feeling of intense relief that he saw a slight tremor of returning consciousness thrill through the lifeless form.

He and Caroline were alone. Under various pretexts he had succeeded in getting Miriam and her aunt out of the room, for their lamentations annoyed him.

He sat by the sofa, holding the dead cold hand in his, and watching the effect of the restoratives he had administered. How little did he dream in that moment of the connection there was between them, or that the pale lips, now faintly quivering with returning life, were the same that, fourteen years before, had cursed him, as he knelt at the feet of the man he had denounced.

Caroline recovered but slowly. Her first impression, as the over-tasked mind struggled back to consciousness, was of a rain of blood dripping in warm, heavy drops, from the ceiling, upon her upturned face, and trickling over her throat and bosom, and through the loosened hair, which felt heavy with the clotted weight. Gradually through the gory mist she distinguished a gigantic shape bending over her, with unnaturally gleaming eyes, that, looking her through and through, seemed, by their magnetic power, to be drawing her back to life. Then came a sensation of keen physical pain,—a giant hand was grasping her wrist, closing around it like a band of iron—bruising, crushing, mangling it—and the blood was no longer a trickling rain, but a seething ocean—swelling, roaring, raging around her; red, gory billows, gurgling

and leaping, and dragging her down by the weight of the blood-soaked hair—by the weight of that iron grip!

Mrs. Leigh's voice broke the spell.

"How is she now, doctor?"

"Recovering, but slowly."

He was watching, with interest not unmixed with wonder, the strange, varying expressions that passed, like swift moving clouds, over the girl's face, during that transition from insensibility to consciousness.

Caroline opened her eyes, and half rose. Dr. Cameron was bending over her, his light, tender hand was on her wrist, he was looking at her attentively; their eyes met, and all the concentrated hate, revenge, horror, and aversion of years gathered and spoke out in the deadly look she bent on him. Instinctively he dropped her hand and drew back.

It had been but a sudden glance—swift as a flash of lightning; then her eyes closed. But what fathomless depths of darkness and desolation does the lightning flash at times reveal.

James Cameron could not take to himself the sinister look of the stranger's eyes, it seemed rather to have been flung out like a curse upon the world to which she was returning.

He mused upon that look on his way home,—any new phase of character had a peculiar interest for him.

CHAPTER XXII.

WE have said that Mrs. Leigh had two new interests; the one we know, the other was a certain fashionable young preacher, by name Cyril Thornton.

She had heard him preach, and was delighted; she had afterwards seen him arm in arm with Charlie Hartwell, an old and prime favourite, and had insisted upon his being brought to her house; and once there, he had received all the petting that the captain had promised

him; and very pleasant he found it. Mrs. Leigh, possessing in an eminent degree the art of setting people at their ease, he soon felt quite as much at home in Rutland Gate as at Manor Farm. He was sensitively proud, and she never wounded his pride by snubbing him, or showing him the cold shoulder; come when he might, he was welcome, if he was not, she did not receive him.

His shyness and want of *aplomb* in general society, were points in his favour: she dearly loved tutoring, and he was a most interesting pupil. She soon gained great influence over him, and he conceived a warm affection for her; she treated him as young men like to be treated; in public as a lion, to be shown off and made much of; in private as the protégé to be alternately lectured and petted. She had a pretty way of laying her hand on his shoulder, of patting his head, sometimes even, when they got more intimate, of passing her fingers through his chestnut curls. She gave her opinion upon the cut of a coat, the shape of a collar, the advisability of a new acquaintance. She strongly recommended his shaving his whiskers, which she condemned as unbecoming in a London preacher; whereas the shorn face, with its dark line, gave such an interest to the countenance, more especially in the pulpit.

He listened to her with deference, and followed her guidance on all points except that of the whiskers, which were at once his strong point and his weakness. He affectioned his whiskers; he admired and respected them; he had coaxed them into growth and luxuriance; he could not part with them! But at her instigation he parted with many habits and prejudices, and by degrees acquired all the ease and self-possession of a man of the world. He no longer blushed when addressed; he no longer made it a rule to pick out the oldest and ugliest female in the room, and fasten himself on to her. But the greatest triumph he achieved was over the——Body! Little by little he had altogether dropped his East End connection; but one day he received a pressing in-

itation to preach the annual sermon on behalf of the schools. The petition was signed by the Rector and *all the Body!*

Three reasons induced him to accept the invitation: the first was the conviction that neither his time nor his talents belonged to himself, but to the God to whom they were devoted; the second was a friendly feeling for Mr. Cheerman, who had always, in a grand patronising way, been kind to him; the third was a desperate wish to meet and defy the Body. "The Schools! the Body!" his flesh crept. Separately and conjointly, what torments had they made him endure! but he would defy both, and thus vindicate his manhood, and test the strength and invulnerability of the coat-of-mail with which Mrs. Charlton Leigh had provided him.

He went: he arrived late, when all were assembled; the eyes of the Body were turned upon him; he did not flinch, but passed through the midst of them with a firm step, a calm brow, and profound indifference. He paused in the midst of his discourse; the eyes were upon him still—fixedly, devouringly; he saw them—and was unmoved! His discourse over, the Body crowded around him—eager, congratulatory, noisy; he stood his ground, and even joked with half-a-dozen of its members, and those the most formidable. Never was victory more complete; could he ever again know fear, now that he had met and defied the Body?

He ceased to be shy, and became bold; he began to joke the old ladies in a respectful, filial sort of way, and his popularity among them rose twenty per cent. He no longer fought shy of the pretty girls: on the contrary, he sought them out, and was not above making himself agreeable to them. He accepted invitations to dinner and evening parties where there was no dancing. He still visited the poor, but was not sorry when the appointment of a second curate took a little of his work among them, off his hands.

Mary said that Cyril had much altered for the better, none that he had altered for the worse; how should

they? It is no advantage to be shy and awkward; and where is the harm in a due attention to one's personal appearance—more especially when one has been blessed with a more than common share of good looks—and in an innocent joke which was never at the expense of others, and never bordered on the profane? Start a serious subject, and the young preacher handled it with the deepest reverence, never forgetting whose he was and whom he served. If more worldly in the drawing-room than formerly, he was still in the pulpit the passionate, the eloquent, the stern, and unflinching messenger of God; and his daily life, not the most fastidious could say that he practised other than he preached.

"They are beginning to appreciate him in London as he deserves," said Mary, with her happy trusting smile, as she read his letters, which, however, were not quite as regular now as when they constituted the only happiness, the only gleam of brightness in his life.

"Yes, of course, dear, they are," said Mrs. Thornton, who acquiesced in every conclusion of Mary's without reserve, and who was quite bewildered by the number of new names, and most of them such fine names, too, that filled the letter.

"He is getting famous," mused Mary, as she stood at the churn, her sleeves tucked up, her skirt ditto, and the warm light of love and pride glowing on her freckled, sunburnt face "I wonder how long it will be now before he is rich—at least rich enough to——"

Mary did not finish the sentence—not even in thought; but the glow deepened on her cheek, and so did the light in her eyes.

One evening, Cyril received an invitation to dinner from Mrs. Leigh, but not written by Mrs. Leigh herself, for her eyes were weak and she hated writing, and Miriam wrote a pretty hand, and was not a little proud of being her aunt's scribe.

Cyril, having read the note, laid it on the table. As he did so, a faint, sweet perfume arose as of freshly culled violets; and as it stole over his senses, it seemed

to steal them away; for there came to him the conviction that he had received just such a missive—rose-tinted, violet-scented—the same hand-writing, and at the same hour before; and yet he had certainly not received a note from Mrs. Leigh or her niece either. He re-read it, examined the characters—the conviction was strengthened.

“I must have dreamt it,” he at last concluded; and, calling Keeper, he went out.

He sauntered through the park, and had just reached the post where he had first met Miriam Edgestone, when Charlie Hartwell joined him—good looking, good tempered, hearty as ever.

“Halloa, old fellow!” he cried, as he linked his arm in his. “How dare you supersede me in the good graces of the ladies? Here am I, just come from Mrs. Leigh, who, three months ago, thought there was not another Charlie Hartwell in the world; and now, forsooth, I must sit and listen to your praises sung in every key, while my new rainbow tie, sported for the express purpose of taking the old lady’s heart by storm, was not even admired; and I can’t call you out, nor could I abuse you, and make you out a villain, for ladies dearly love villains—handsome ones, at least. Mrs. Leigh said that she was sure you made sad havoc among the hearts of the ladies, although you are so modest and reserved upon the subject. I told her that you had had to engage a private postman, as the general post-bag could not hold all the rhymes and sonnets, love-letters and rendezvous, addressed to you every Monday after one of your soul-stirring discourses. I believe the pretty little niece took it for Gospel-truth; for she blushed such a blush! and—halloa! by Jove, why what’s the fellow about?”

Cyril had extricated his arm from that of the Captain, and was off like a shot. A light had suddenly flashed in upon him.

“By Jove!” repeated the Captain (Cyril was already out of sight), “devilish odd fellows those geniuses. And to think that *she* never even noticed my tie.” He raised

his hand to it, and stroked it proudly—the same with his moustache; then he entered a perfumer's shop where he was well known. The young lady behind the counter, pretty and amiable, French and a coquette, fell into ecstasies over "Monsieur's cravate." Our captain was pleased, but not satisfied.

"I wonder what *she* thought of it," he muttered, as he knocked a particle of dust off his boots with his cane, before entering the park.

It was the fashionable hour. He soon found half-a-dozen friends, and lounged about with them, talking, laughing, smoking, staring, bowing.

"I say, Hartwell, you're looking out for some one," said a brother-officer, who had noticed his restless glances, and the look of disappointment that hailed every passing carriage.

"L—— [a popular actress] does not seem to be here to-day?"

"No; a dinner at Richmond."

The Captain still continued to scan the carriages, and was strangely absent and monosyllabic. "It was not L—— he wanted," concluded the brother-officer. The friends, tired at last of bowing and staring, beat a retreat; and he was left alone, leaning over the railing in rather a disconsolate attitude. He had finished his cigar, and did not care to light another. He felt depressed and melancholy. Had he been capable of rhyming eyes with skies, he would have written a sonnet on the spot.

At last his patience was rewarded. A carriage drove by, close to the spot where he stood. Its occupants both smiled; one kissed her hand to him, the other blushed. It was but a passing vision: but, such as it was, he carried it home with him, and deemed it quite worth the hour's waiting to have caught sight of that bright, rosy, dimpled face, with its smile and its blush.

Meanwhile, Cyril, having been seized with an idea, hurried home, ascended the stairs three at a time, burst into the room, rushed to a drawer, tossed over a motley

heap of papers, bills, notes, receipts, love-letters, verses, advertisements, addresses—every scrap of paper, in short, not immediately destroyed, went there, waiting to be sorted, until the drawer was so full as not by any possibility to be closed. One exception only there was, Cousin Mary's letters, which had a drawer to themselves.

After a frantic search which strewed the floor around, he found what he sought—a tinted note, from which the breath of violets had not altogether passed.

Exhausted, but triumphant, he compared together the two notes; the paper, the scent, the writing were identical; and there were even the same initials—M. E., Miriam Edgestone. Then she it was who had written him that pretty, adoring, sentimental letter, which had interested him, and then been forgotten! He read it over again—pondered over it—and it set his heart and brain on fire. How well he remembered the day he had received it; and, by a strange coincidence, on that very day he had first seen her. Ah, he did not wonder now at her violent blush and strange agitation. He recalled her as he had seen her then—and since; he longed to see her again; he wondered how he could have been so cold and indifferent in her presence; lovely he had ever thought her, but now only was she lovely for him.

A spark sometimes suffices to kindle the fiercest flame; that foolish letter, the outpourings of a young girl's heart, pure and romantic, sufficed to kindle in Cyril's breast a fire none the less ardent for being so suddenly lighted.

That night he was feverish; he did not sleep well. The next day he was feverish still—restless and unhappy. In the afternoon he wandered about, hoping—yet dreading—to meet her; and catching sight of a bonnet that might be hers, he fled as if for his life.

A few days afterwards, when he went to Mrs. Leigh's, according to her invitation, when he saw Miriam cross the room to welcome him, laughing, blooming, radiant, in a dress pure and fresh as herself, and the most coquettish of blue ribbons nestling in her hair and bosom, and floating from her arms and waist, she was no longer

the pretty woman to be admired, but the divinity to be adored. As he clasped her hand he thrilled and paled. He no longer cared to talk to her; it was happiness enough to be in her presence, to glance at her from time to time, each look revealing some new intoxicating charm. Now it was the soft oval of her cheek—the contour of her white throat—the shadow of the brown lashes when the eyes were down—the soft velvet of the brown eyes when they were raised. One stray lock of hair had got displaced, and hung lower than the rest; had Miriam known it, she would have escaped to her room to adjust it; he almost worshipped that tress, and would have kissed it on his knees.

He was so silent the whole evening, that Mrs. Leigh grew concerned.

“Was he unwell?” she asked; “had anything occurred?”

He reassured her, and tried to rouse himself; but the conversation languished; that one presence, so sacred to the heart first awakening to the shadowy mysteries of love, awed him into silence. Entranced, he hung upon her every word and look; when she spoke, he started; her laugh, clear and joyous, oppressed him with a vague sense of sadness; it seemed to remove her farther from him; whereas a pensive look on her face seemed to draw her nearer to him—to connect them by some secret sympathy.

That day began a new era in Cyril Thornton's existence. It was not because he had hitherto been content with the half fond but wholly selfish affection he felt for cousin Mary that he was therefore incapable of any warmer passion; you may pass on to middle age without knowing what love is, yet you are none the safer for that; a chance word—a look—a smile—a tear—a sigh—the touch of a hand—the outline of a foot—the crumpling of a leaf—the turn of a straw—and you are as irrevocably lost as was ever hot impetuous youth.

Cyril had passed unscathed through the temptations of his college life; thrown upon the great world of Lon-

don, his poverty, his shyness, the false position in which he had found himself placed, had held him both above and beyond the reach of the tender passion; transferred to a more congenial soil, he saw beauty, grace, talent, and admired, but remained cold; his heart was untouched, and might have remained so to all eternity, had not that mischievous rose-tinted note wrought so sudden and extraordinary a change.

An enthusiast, a visionary, devoted heart and soul (or at least believing himself thus devoted) to his vocation, living in it hitherto alone, proud of it alone, jealous for it alone, he was none the less a man, and more than that—a Thornton! which is as much as to say that he was hot-blooded, ardent, impassioned. His calling had now a rival—the heart was no longer one with the soul; each had its separate life—its separate aim. Unfortunately, joined to the impetuous nature inherited from the Thorntons in general, his was the soul of the dreamer and the visionary, inherited from that one Cyril Thornton in particular; it was impossible, therefore, for him to love like other people, in a sober, sensible way, as is the fashion now-a-days. *The great passion* reduced to minimum doses; the science of homoeopathy!—palatable, harmless, safe, no violent shocks to the system, no mighty sweatings, no fierce struggles signifying life and death. The power of the passion itself is not denied; on the contrary, it is openly acknowledged—labelled *Poison*, without disguise; but eked out in infinitesimal fractions, where is the danger? In the worst cases, two tiny pills at first sight, three at second; perhaps, if the courtship be a long one, the dose may be increased to six, but never beyond; six colourless, flavourless, harmless pills, to cease altogether after the honey moon, when the patient may be pronounced *cured*.

What a pity it is that we have not all of us an unbounded faith in homoeopathy! that we still—some of us—the number fortunately, however, decreasing every day—try violent remedies, and prefer bitterness to insipidity, the disease to the cure.

Cyril, though a talented young man in his way, was decidedly behind the age in which he lived, namely, the nineteenth century. Miriam was not simply to him the pretty little girl who, with a fair face and fair chance of inheriting the aunt's fortune, was not a bad speculation: she was the centre of his dreams—the aim for his ambition—a living, haunting presence—that seemed farthest off when a reality, nearest when a vision. She sat by him in his long hours of meditation; she stooped over him when he worked, aiding his inspirations; she bent over his pillow; though alone, he was never lonely; she filled every thought, every hope, every desire, every corner of his heart and life; never had he been so supremely happy, and at the same time so sad.

Even in the pulpit, from which had hitherto been banished every other presence but the one that overshadowed and inspired him, she passed in along with him. If his first impulse on entering it was to bow the head in prayer, his second was to glance involuntarily down the aisle in search of a fashionable crape bonnet shading a bright sweet face.

His preaching also underwent a change; it softened and mellowed, became less stern and more tender, less startling, but more persuasive: it probed the conscience less deeply, but touched the heart more. All the feelings and emotions he felt stirring within him he poured forth in those weekly bursts of eloquence; for his love was pure and good—such a love as He who, together with an immortal soul and *one* spark of His divinity, has given us a human heart, with its longings and desires, could not disapprove.

In another respect, too, a change had come o'er
“The spirit of his dream.”

This change was in his feelings towards Mary. Up to this time she had been to him what the absent sister is to the home-sick schoolboy, and something more; she had been his friend, his counsellor, his comforter, and, beyond all this, his confidante: she was this no longer; of the one thought, and that so deep and all absorbing,

he never spoke. She knew nothing of the secret hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, of the heart that had hitherto been open to her, and so sympathy died between them. He could not speak to her of Miriam, and did not therefore care to speak to her at all. Still he wrote regularly, and, as far as his affairs and daily life were concerned, fully. Her answers, too, still gave him pleasure, but he did not long for them; he read them with interest, but only once; he smiled, but no longer sighed over them; and never now, as heretofore, did they awaken pleasant memories of evening strolls, long firelight talks, of loving looks, and words, and soft caresses; then, too, they no longer had a drawer to themselves—that was sacred henceforth to the two rose-tinted, violet-scented sheets that were to be prized and cherished beyond all other earthly treasures.

Friendship, however close, dwarfs, if it does not die, before the might of love. Woe be unto those who mistake the first for the last, and whose eyes are opened too late!

Was Cyril to blame? Was he to blame for the past or the present? Was it his fault that Mary mistook the shadow for the substance, the selfish outpourings of the dreamer's heart for a love deep and lasting as her own?

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Mary waited and trusted, and knew not that the happiness for which she thanked God so humbly, night and morning on her knees, had passed from her life.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WINIFRED was about again, she had played the invalid as long as possible; for naturally indolent, with no interest beyond her home, and within it only just sufficient to enjoy its comforts, she was quite content to fancy herself confined to her couch, there to be waited upon, coaxed, and petted by every member of the small house-

hold separately and collectively. Very pretty she looked in her morning dress of soft grey cashmere, trimmed with blue velvet, with her transparent skin and loose bright waving hair.

There are husbands, and they are not few in number, who cannot appreciate beauty in a wife. James Cameron was not of these; never did he look at that fair picture without being struck by its exceeding beauty. Ever since that day when he had stood with her in the valley of the shadow of death, and when, with her head on his breast, and her eyes turned towards the great Unknown that lay before her, she had given him an insight into the heart that beat so faintly beneath his encircling arm, she had seemed nearer to him, more entirely his. Love for him was not so much a passion as a religion: he was true to it as he was to God; he had never asked himself what the love that binds together man and woman really is? a chain so strong as often to defy time and death, yet made of a thousand different metals, some pure, some base: passion and sentiment, sympathy and attraction, unity, if perfect, of heart, mind, and body; exaction and devotion, the subtlest egotism, the grandest self-abnegation, either the holiest and most complete of human passions, or the deadliest and most degrading. He did not ask himself what that woman, beautiful and gentle, might have been for him, he only knew what she was to him.

In her weakness, shut out from the rest of the world, she clung to him more than she had ever done before; she even showed something like pleasure in his presence, and pain at his absence. Perhaps it was, that having lately devoted himself so exclusively to her, he knew better how to accommodate himself to her fancies and caprices, to bring his strong mind down to a level with hers, and converse on such subjects as were within the scope of her interest and sympathies. Certain it is that she looked forward to his return in the evening, and once even she made him a little plaintive reproach, that was sweeter to him than the tenderest caress might have

been to some other man. She said, "How late you are to-day, James, I expected you half an hour ago, and have done nothing but look at the clock ever since. The time seemed so long."

Sympathy will bind together hearts the most dissimilar, he had once said; was it so binding theirs?

Among those who had been most attentive to Winifred was Mrs. Leigh, and she was one of the first to be admitted into the sick-room, not from preference, but simply because the doctor had said it must be so; and though Winifred might slight a wish, she never disobeyed a command.

Perhaps no two characters were less likely to assimilate than that of Winifred and Mrs. Leigh. The latter could not like what she did not understand; she had never quite understood Ruth, and still less could she understand James Cameron's wife. "What was she, a child or a woman?—very good or very bad?" She was an enigma to her; she did not believe in her; apparently the gentlest and most submissive of wives, she doubted whether she made her husband as happy as she might; she even sometimes doubted whether she really loved him. Her looks, her words, her actions were harmless, but there was a something wanting in them; never could she be roused into anything like warmth, or a genuine expression of feeling. If Mrs. Leigh praised the baby, Winifred smiled and brought in something about nurse, as if the matter concerned her more particularly; if she spoke with flushed cheeks and enthusiasm of the husband, who was for her the best and noblest of men, Winifred opened her large eyes very wide, looked rather alarmed at her visitor's vehemence, and said—"Oh, yes, he was very good, very good indeed, Aunt Deborah had always said so." This, and a hundred trifles too impalpable to be seized, prevented Mrs. Leigh liking James Cameron's wife; but she was none the less kind and attentive for all that.

Calling one day she found Winifred low and depressed. "Was she ill?" she asked with concern.

"Oh, no, not ill, but James has to go into the country, and will be away a whole day and night. He has never been away so long, you know, since baby's birth. A whole day and night! how dull and nervous I shall feel."

"I and Miriam will come and spend the evening with you," said Mrs. Leigh. Winifred's brow did not clear. "And, if possible, I will persuade Miss Drugh, the young lady who sings so divinely, to come too." Winifred began to revive; if she really cared for anything it was for music.

Mrs. Leigh drove at once to Elysium Terrace; she found Ruth out and Miss Drugh at home; that was just what she wished. After much coaxing and flattery, she proffered her request.

"It would be a real charity, it would indeed," she pleaded, seeing the young lady's brow darken. Perhaps she was offended at the unceremonious introduction. "Mrs. Cameron was so languid and nervous, and such a passionate lover of music——"

"You said Dr. Cameron would be from home?"

Caroline was playing with a black ribbon she wore round her neck, and to which was probably attached, so Mrs. Leigh thought, some memento of the *lost friend*, and Mrs. Leigh was right.

"Yes, certainly; but why do you ask? I hope our dear Doctor has not made an unfavourable impression? His manners at first sight are rough, it is true; but he is so good, so really good, that the longer you know him the more you love and venerate him."

"Indeed!" Caroline's tone was cold and absent; she was still playing with the black ribbon.

"You will come—won't you?"

"Yes, I will come."

Ruth heard of the intended visit with a pang, not of envy but regret—regret that she, too, could not see the beautiful young wife and the little child, and the home in which *he* lived and was happy. Yes, happy. How could he be otherwise, surrounded by all he loved? If

she could see him so, she would be content; and he would no longer appear to her, as he had hitherto done, like one standing alone, his every look and word stamped with the impress of solitary thought and unshared feeling.

"I am glad you are going," she said to Caroline as she helped her to dress—and she spoke the truth; yet, when she watched her drive off in Mrs. Leigh's carriage, a feeling of utter loneliness crept over her, and she sighed as she returned to the parlour and the heap of household work—darning, piecing, mending—that there awaited her.

"Why, what have you done with yourself, child?" was Mrs. Leigh's involuntary exclamation as Caroline entered the drawing-room in Rutland Gate, where she and Miriam sat awaiting her. "I never saw you look so handsome." Nor was the exclamation unwarranted. Caroline certainly looked very handsome; yet her attire was simple enough: a plain black silk dress; round her neck one row of large pearls, and, instead of a hood, a large lace shawl thrown, like the Spanish mantilla, over her head and shoulders; but her cheek was flushed, and its rich crimson heightened the feverish lustre of her eyes, and contrasted with the pale olive of her skin that, always beautiful by candlelight, was now almost dazzling; the full lips, too, usually so colourless, glowed warm and red; altogether, her appearance was brilliant in the extreme.

"What a loss to the stage!" groaned Mrs. Leigh.

Caroline was unusually silent during the drive; it was only when she found herself in the hall, and heard the door close behind her, that she awoke as from a dream. The closing of that door was as the opening of a new chapter in her life; she did not hesitate, she had no wish to draw back; but the thought that the one wish of her heart had been accomplished, and that it had been granted to her to carry her curse over James Cameron's threshold, awed her into silence.

When the Doctor heard of Miss Drugh's visit, he look-

ed thoughtful and troubled; he had only seen her once it is true, but he could not forget the expression he had surprised in her eyes—it was dark and dangerous; and he had more than once been tempted to give a timely warning to Mrs. Leigh, and through her to Ruth Edgestone; one thought alone held him back—she was an orphan and friendless; he dared not wrong her by even a hint. So he kept his own counsel, and trusted to Winifred's dislike of strangers to prevent the acquaintance being more than a passing one. And as Miss Drugh did not again come to the house, and Winifred never mentioned her, he soon forgot her and the disagreeable impression she had made upon him.

As soon as Winifred was well enough to go out, nurse, who found the square dull, and baby heavy, and who, moreover, liked to see something of the world and its fashion, insisted upon a daily drive to the park, and when there, they dismounted according to her order. Every day, therefore, when fine, mother, child, and nurse, might have been seen occupying two chairs in the immediate vicinity of the band. One bright afternoon they sat there as usual, baby asleep in nurse's lap, Winifred playing with her fan and listening to the music. We have said that she liked music, indeed she liked everything that appealed in a passive way to the senses—beauty, flowers, sunshine, delicate food, luxurious ease. She should have been an Eastern sultana, reclining in rich attire on piled cushions, attended, fanned, sung to, surrounded with splendour, luxury, and perfume. As it was, she might have sat for the personification of Indolence, scarce the lifting of a hand, the quiver of a muscle, disturbing the lazy grace of her attitude. Now and then she would exchange a bow or monosyllabic greeting with some acquaintance, but she discouraged any nearer approach; she hated general conversation, it bored her; and she was of too self-indulgent a nature to victimise herself.

Nurse's mind was wholly given up to watching the passers-by; she dearly loved to see fine dresses and fine

figures. As her sharp eyes wandered hither and thither, they were arrested by a solitary figure pacing slowly up and down under the trees, apart from the other promenaders. There was something almost nunlike in her black dress and mantle, lowered veil, and measured walk. Was she telling her beads? Nurse felt interested.

"What are you looking at, nurse?" asked Winifred, yawning.

Nurse pointed to the lonely figure, and Mrs. Cameron recognised Miss Drugh. She watched her for some time with languid interest, half wishing, half dreading to attract her notice. Caroline had gone to Russell Square resolved upon winning Mrs. Cameron's favour, and she had succeeded beyond her expectations. The undefined something that men call attraction, had at once drawn James Cameron's wife to the dark handsome stranger with the sweet voice, and her singing had afterwards completed the conquest.

At parting she had given her a half-invitation to renew her visit; but of this she had not availed herself, nor had they met since.

Miss Drugh left the shadow of the trees, and passed slowly before the row of chairs, so close, that she brushed Winifred's silken skirts, but without noticing her. — Just then baby awoke and set up a piteous wail. Caroline raised her head and recognised James Cameron's wife, who pointed eagerly to a vacant chair beside her. "Will you not sit down?" she said; "you must be tired, and I am so dull."

Caroline complied with a smile, and soon without apparent effort, she had contrived to interest her companion in what she was saying. In one respect Winifred and her husband agreed exactly—in their dislike to gossip; but with her it simply arose from a profound indifference to her kind, that prevented any interest in their concerns. The realities of life, its joys and sorrows, trials and temptations, she never discussed, they wearied her. Her mind was a chaos of shapeless images, and confused feelings, to which she never gave form or colouring;

shifting impressions, gone before she could seize and put them into words. She was a being apart from the rest of the world, both above and beneath its sympathies; she as little understood them as they understood her. But Caroline, whose life had been one of thought, guessed at some of the workings of this weak sensitive nature, and seizing a meaning in her uncertain, disconnected talk, answered to it. She spoke of music and its influence, on the senses rather than the soul, of the pleasures of passive enjoyment, of the luxury of silence and solitude, the folded hands, the closed eyes, the frame thrilling to every passing impression, to the murmur of the breeze, the rays of the sun, the scent of flowers, the strains of a favourite song, floating idly through the brain, repeated again and again. She spoke quietly with subdued eloquence, and the music of her voice added to the strange fascination of her words. Winifred understood, and could follow her.

"My mother wrote poetry," she said, after a short silence on either side. "I have read it. I think she must have felt as I do sometimes, only that I can never put my feelings into words."

As she spoke she slowly raised her eyes to the deep azure sky, over which light feathery clouds were floating.

The words had apparently no connection with the subject upon which Caroline had last spoken, yet they were an answer to it.

"I never knew my mother," said Caroline; "she died in giving me birth."

"Yes, in giving me birth," repeated Winifred, softly, as if speaking to herself. "She stretched out her arms for me, but when nurse put me into them she was dead."

"But I did not miss her; my father was all to me that she might have been; I needed no love but his—he was so good!" went on Caroline.

"Oh, yes—so good," echoed Winifred, once more; "he never refused me anything, and he said he only worked so hard to make me rich and happy."

"And when I was old enough to value his love, and know what it was worth, he was taken from me by a dreadful death."

"Dreadful, indeed!" shuddered Winifred, as she recalled that first awful day of grief and terror.

Caroline continued, "And I was left to the charity of an aunt, who hated, whilst she fed me."

"Yes; I think Aunt Deborah hated me, she always spoke to me as if she did, and she only kept me out of charity because I was poor and had no friends; she told me so on my wedding-day, and that James only married me out of charity too. But how did you know all this?"

"All what?"

"The history of my life; about poor papa and mamma and Aunt Deborah?"

"It was my own life I was telling you."

Caroline had gathered all particulars of Winifred's past life from Mrs. Leigh, and was now taking advantage of it to gain her confidence.

Winifred was silent a moment, then she said, "How strange that your life and mine should be the same. Is it that, do you think, that makes us feel the same?"

"Perhaps."

Here nurse ventured to remark that the carriage had been waiting half-an-hour at the gate, and that it was getting too late for baby to be out.

At parting, Winifred said, entreatingly, "You will come and see me, won't you? James is so much away, and I am sometimes so dull."

Caroline pleaded the distance between their homes, but added that she was every day in the park at the same hour. "And you will not mention this or any future meeting to Dr. Cameron or Mrs. Leigh," was her parting injunction.

The tone in which this was said made it a command. Winifred did not trouble herself about the strangeness of the request, she simply complied with it: it was the first deception she had practised upon her husband.

From that time they met in the park almost daily, and Caroline, without asking a question or betraying anything like curiosity, had soon contrived to find out as much of Winifred's private life as she cared to know. She made her talk of her husband, and every word was an unconscious praise; the selfish indifferent wife was but the echo of the warm-hearted enthusiastic friend, Mrs. Leigh, and gentle, meek-hearted Ruth; Caroline saw him great, good, honoured, raised high above the breath of slander, and her hate and thirst for revenge increased tenfold—if she could have despised she would have forgiven him.

She had but one aim in her intercourse with Winifred, to wean her from her husband, and she succeeded; gradually, imperceptibly, but surely. By a subtle system of reasoning, even while praising him, she sowed the seeds of doubt and mistrust. Hitherto a mere child, taking everything, her husband's love and goodness among the rest, on trust, Winifred was now taught to reason upon his conduct, and while reasoning, to question it. From the first, Caroline Drugh had penetrated her weak, indolent, sensitive nature, and realized to the full the fearful ascendancy she could, if she wished, gain over her. She felt that that ascendancy could be equally great for good or evil; the character before her was like a blank page on which her hand could trace whatever characters she might see fit. She gloried in the consciousness, and exaggerated her power; she believed that it depended only upon her to restore the young creature to her husband as a faithful, loving, grateful wife, and tender mother, or to make her——. Caroline was of a character too stormy and passionate to do things by halves; she had now found an object and aim for her life.

The mind can be poisoned as well as the body; the slower the process, the safer and surer; for then even antidotes are powerless. Day by day the poison was distilled into the young wife's ear; she was led to see that her life was not that of other young things of her

age; that it was but a cruel act of charity that took her from the hopes and dreams of a youth, that left to itself might have been bright and beautiful in the future, to doom it to a life of neglect, loneliness, and dreary monotony. Who had gained by the bargain? Doctor Cameron had a beautiful young mistress for his house, a child to perpetuate the name of which he was so proud, and for neither wife nor child did he make any sacrifice, nor did he occupy himself more about them than about the rest of his establishment of which they formed a part. Winifred, for the first time, realised, or began to realise, that she was beautiful; and sometimes when sitting before the glass, she felt a strange thrill, half vanity, half something else, hitherto unknown; and remembered certain words of her new friend, pictures of happy, brilliant homes, where wives, such as she, married, for love instead of charity, lived a life of luxury and splendour, adored and envied. She understood but half what she heard, but by degrees a sense of wrong—of irreparable injury done to her youth and beauty by the man who had, according to Miss Drugh's reasoning, married her without love, rose up between her and her husband: yet never once had Caroline Drugh said a word that even the Doctor himself could have complained of; her attacks were indirect, impersonal, and, for that, all the more dangerous.

It is hard when through no fault of our own the heart in which we have centred our all of domestic happiness, grows daily more and more estranged, whilst we, upon whom lie the burden and heat of the day, go our way gaining by the sweat of our brow, and often at the sacrifice of half a life, the peace and security of the home which we leave with such undoubting confidence, morning after morning, all unconscious of the danger that threatens our peace and honour.

Ever since her marriage Winifred had as a matter of course accompanied her husband to the Presbyterian chapel, sitting in Lucy's place, quiet and demure, looking

over his book, joining her young voice to his in prayer and praise; and at such times it was that she seemed nearest to him and to his love; and often in the pauses of the service he would turn to look at the little face that, with its clear pale profile and down cast lids, looked so pure and even saintlike.

To the harassed professional man, whose hours of leisure and repose were so few, this brief season of holy quiet and contemplation were the sweetest of the busy week; and then the pleasant walk home, she hanging on his arm, her simple prattle not jarring upon the solemn calm of the Sabbath, but rather blending with it the holiest sounds of earth, the voice of home and its affections. All this James Cameron told his child-wife more than once, speaking with the half-grave, half-playful earnestness that marked his intercourse with her.

By chance in the course of conversation his words were repeated to Caroline Drugh; Winifred had scarcely understood them—*she* did perfectly. She pondered over them, and a few days afterwards, the Doctor having been summoned into the country, she proposed to Mrs. Cameron to go with her to St. Mark's on the following Sunday—her husband being away—to hear the eloquent young preacher who was making such a sensation. She went; it was the church where she had worshipped as a girl; and the charm, the brilliance of the service, the singing, the preaching, the beautiful church unseen so long, and filled with all the fashion of the season, appealed to her senses; and when her companion quietly remarked that no doubt, if she wished it, Dr. Cameron would take her a sitting there, and would find it quite natural that she should prefer the faith of her childhood to that which she had adopted without even understanding it, she resolved to act upon her advice, and get a sitting at St. Mark's.

With the unconscious deception fostered in her from her cradle by her Irish nurse, and only held for a while in check by the blind faith in her husband, that had been as a second nature—she pleaded the weak state

of her health that made the length of the sermon a weariness and a pain, and the longing to pray once more in the church where her parents had been married, where she herself had been baptised, and where she had knelt Sunday after Sunday as a girl. "It will only be for a time, James, you know," she concluded, "just till I get a little stronger, but I feel it would make me so much happier—you will take a sitting there for me—won't you?"

She was but repeating almost word for word what Caroline Drugh had said. Caroline, who understood her husband so much better than she did.

He was not the man to resist such pleadings; the depth and sincerity of his attachment to the faith of his fathers made him respect his wife's professions—his feelings must not interfere with hers. So he took her a sitting at St. Mark's, had it hassocked and cushioned; and while there was a new bond of sympathy between Winifred and Caroline Drugh, there was one less between the wife and husband; and as Sunday after Sunday he bowed his head and prayed for the absent wife who would never again sit beside him in God's house, he felt how alone he was, in heart and soul at least, now and for evermore.

That summer was a very hot and unhealthy one; Winifred seemed to feel it. She looked pale and weary; baby too, but a wee puny thing at best, drooped and grew daily more fretful.

Dr. Cameron proposed a month of seaside or country air; he himself sparing a day to take his dear ones down, and see them comfortably installed.

At any other time Winifred would have agreed at once, sure that whatever he arranged must be for the best; but Miss Drugh had given her other views, and whilst owning that she felt weak and pined for change of air, she positively refused to go so far from home. "Baby might be ill, and she should feel so lonely; but she had thought of something else—so nice, oh! so nice—if he would only agree—something that would make her so

happy, and baby too. Poor little baby! who looked so small and white, and so different from other children."

She spoke softly and with a troubled look in her great eyes—the doctor stooping over her chair, looked long and anxiously at the child she held in her lap. Never claiming affection for himself, it was touching to see how jealous he was of it, for the wee helpless thing who was a part of himself, his child as well as hers. There was little that Winifred could have asked of James Cameron with their child in his arms that he would not have granted. Now as he looked from one to the other, something in their looks, both so small, so frail, struck him with mingled pain and pity. "What would make you and the child happy, Winifred?"

She turned round, her face bright with hope. "Oh will you really give it me, James? I want a little house at Richmond, a little house with a garden. I never had a garden, and I love flowers so dearly—and baby could be always out in the open air—and I should not be afraid, for you would be so near, and could always come down and see us, and we could remain the whole summer, and I should be so happy—so happy!"

James Cameron knew that a summer at Richmond would entail an almost complete separation for that time. "I will think it over, my child," he said, quietly.

"And then you will say yes, for baby's sake and mine, and I shall have a greenhouse and water my flowers every day, and baby will get fat and strong, like Mrs. Joyce's baby, which is twice as big and only a month older; and when can I know—this evening?"

"This day fortnight—I am slow at arriving at conclusions, you know."

Winifred pouted, but she persisted no further.

About a week after this conversation, Grace Ingles asked for a holiday, a thing so unprecedented that it set the whole household in commotion—the doctor alone did not seem surprised. On the day she was expected home he proposed to his wife that they should drive down to Richmond to pay a visit. Winifred, who, from

the force of habit, still looked upon an excursion with her husband as a treat, all the greater because so very rare, joyfully agreed. Baby and nurse were to go too.

The day was a glorious one, a late thunder storm had cleared the air, which was fresher and cooler than it had been for weeks.

The doctor, throwing off his anxious cares and duties for that evening, at least, conversed during the drive upon every subject that could interest the childish creature at his side. He seemed very happy. "Here we are!" he said at last, as they stopped at the gate of a pretty garden, tastefully laid out, and just then in full bloom. "Oh how beautiful!" cried Winifred, with a sigh half pleasure, half envy, as they walked down the avenue under the shade of the wide-spreading chestnut-trees—then she relapsed into silence, her great restless eyes wandering hither and thither lost in admiration—now of the wild luxuriance of roses, now of a basin well stocked with gold fish—of the rustic arbours, and statues scattered here and there.

"Will you ask them to give me a bunch of those roses to take home with me, James?" she asked, turning back to cast on them a last wistful glance as they approached the house. "They would make even our great dull rooms look brighter."

Her husband smiled, but did not answer.

The house, situated on a rise, with a smooth green lawn in front, was a thorough suburban villa, small, white, cosy-looking, with all the sitting-room windows opening upon a verandah covered with sweet smelling plants, jasmine, honeysuckle, and roses.

On the threshold the doctor paused and said, solemnly, "May God bless our new home, my wife."

She looked up bewildered and half frightened. "Our home, oh, James!"

He smiled down on her well pleased. "Yes, the summer home you asked me for;" then he took his child from nurse's arms into his own, and so they entered

the house—entered with smiles and a blessing to leave it—how?

In the pretty drawing-room, so simple and home-like, with its flowered carpet, muslin curtains and well-filled flower-stand, they found Grace and tea awaiting them; the former less stiff and grim than usual, for the innocent little surprise concocted by the doctor and carried out by both, was certainly not a thing to look grim over.

Had some of the grave doctor's patients heard of his hatching a surprise for his foolish little wife, they would have wondered or sneered; but such men as James Cameron can defy the world's criticisms and its sneers too.

When a day or two afterwards Caroline Drugh heard of the success of her manoeuvre, when Winifred enchanted with her new domain, expatiated almost enthusiastically upon its thousand beauties, describing their first arrival, and even repeating her husband's solemn welcome, she turned her face aside, and was silent. For the first time she took no undue advantage of her companion's childish confidence—on that one act of love she cast no slur—she could not; and when Winifred and her child had driven off to her new home, to its love, its sunshine, and its flowers, she wandered away under the dark trees with a great longing throbbing at her heart, for she was but a woman after all, though a stormy and passionate one. For the moment, the past—its wrongs, its hate, and its vengeance—slept; and sitting on a retired bench, listening to the far-off sounds of life, she covered her face with her hands, and the passionate cry arose: "Oh! for something to love, something to live for—less bitter, less wicked than vengeance! Others lived and loved, and were happy—happy, oh God! And she had never known what the word meant, and never could. To the dreary solitude she called home she must now return, carrying with her the image of that other home—so beautiful, so complete—husband, wife, and child. Fool!" she cried, suddenly, and fiercely, wringing her hands in mingled scorn and rage, as she thought

of the weak creature James Cameron called wife, "Such a husband, such a home! and you would sacrifice the peace and love of both at the bidding of a stranger who curses while she leads you. What has he done to you? you, who should so reverence him, that you conspire against his honour and his happiness; poor, miserable, weak, deluded fool. Yes, he is my enemy; the murderer, the betrayer of my broken-hearted father; but were he otherwise, were he to me what he is to you——" She paused, then added, through her clenched teeth, "My love should defend as my hate shall pursue him—unto death!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

FOR several days Doctor Cameron found it impossible to get down to Richmond, even for a few hours; one bright evening, however, he opened the gate and passed into the garden lying so cool and still amid the evening shadows. Tip was with him, Grace had purposely left him behind to keep the master company, and it was not without a struggle that he had made up his mind to part with his old friend. But Tip would enjoy his freedom, a quiet stroll in the garden, and to bask in the sun, forgetting for a while his age and many grievances. Then, too, he was a good watch-dog, and would help to protect his mistress and baby; so he had been brought down to Richmond, though the doctor sighed to think how lonely the study would be without him.

The first person he saw was nurse, who proudly drew his attention to baby's improved looks. She told him that Mrs. Cameron was taking tea in the arbour, but she said nothing of the guest, who had arrived the day before. Nurse knew when to speak and when to be silent.

"What do you hear, is baby crying?" asked Winifred,

as Miss Drugh broke off suddenly in the midst of a sentence, and bent her head in a listening attitude.

"Your husband is coming," she answered quietly and half rose, then resumed her seat, at the same time screening her features with the large garden hat she had thrown off a moment before.

"My husband? oh, no, I think not," said Winifred, indifferently; "he is always so busy, he told me not to expect him for several days. It is only the gardener," and she changed the subject. "What were you saying just now?"

But her companion did not answer, she was still listening to the slow heavy footsteps along the gravel path.

Dr. Cameron entered, Winifred sprang up to meet him, offering no caress it is true, but quite ready to receive his. "Only think," laughed the young wife, "Miss Drugh, who never saw you but once, recognised your footstep and I did not."

"Miss Drugh!" The exclamation, the sudden start, the darkening of the doctor's brow did not escape the visitor; the surprise was evidently not a pleasant one. He gave her a searching glance, she met it, her eyes confronting his—dark, deep, fathomless. The advantage was on her side, she knew him, and he did not know her.

"It was so kind of Miss Drugh to come," said Winifred, by way of explanation. "I felt so nervous at being alone, and Mrs. Leigh said it would be so nice if she would come. I met her there yesterday, and she came back with me—it was so kind."

The doctor bowed, and Tip, who sat at his master's feet, pressing close up against him, uttered a low portentous growl. Caroline put out her hand as if to caress him; the growl deepened, and Tip showed his teeth, glaring fiercely at her from under his tangled locks.

"Oh, don't, Miss Drugh—please don't!" cried Winifred, recoiling in actual terror; "he will bite you, he is so fierce, so cruel."

The Doctor smiled down on his old friend and stroked

his shaggy head. "Poor old fellow! you can defend your master, but not yourself. Shall he do it for you? I assure you, Miss Drugh, he is not as bad as he seems; he has a thousand good qualities, though they do not appear on the surface."

"Oh, of course," interrupted Winifred, fretfully; "you always take his part, because he is so fond of you and baby."

"And not a bad reason either, eh, Tip? It shows that we cannot dispense with the love of even an ugly old cross-grained dog like you."

There was a touch of sadness in the playful words. Caroline turned on the bowed careworn face, the eyes scarcely less keen and far-seeing than his own, then she bent forward and patted the rough head on which James Cameron's hand had lain only a moment before.

It was already late when they returned to the house. "I wish," said Winifred, as they lingered in the verandah, as if loth to lose anything of the extreme beauty of the evening, "that you would sing us something, Miss Drugh; we would sit out here as we did yesterday, it was so beautiful."

Caroline was about to refuse when a thought struck her; she glanced at the Doctor, who had seated himself absently on the bench, his old terrier between his knees.

"Would it not, perhaps, disturb Dr. Cameron?" she asked. He did not hear the remark; Winifred had to repeat it. He started slightly; then said, indifferently, "Disturb me; oh no! why should it?" And he relapsed into thought.

The first thing she sang was an Italian air, deep, rich, passionate. When she ceased Winifred was loud in praise; the doctor said nothing; she hardly knew, indeed, whether he had heard it.

"Do you like Italian music, Doctor Cameron?" she asked. When addressing him her voice was always very low, and had in it a soft tremor that he mistook for timidity; it predisposed him in her favour; he was

not insensible to the music of a beautiful voice—no man is.

“I am but a poor judge of music,” he said, bluntly, “and cannot pretend to give an opinion; what you sang seemed pretty enough, but, as you sing well, anything else would have pleased me equally, no doubt.”

“We shall see.” She laughed a low quiet laugh, not less musical than her voice. “I will sing you something translated from the German. I sang it once at a charitable concert; it is thoroughly German—wild, dramatic, yet philosophic too, I think. The whole would be too long to sing now, but the story can be told in a few words.”

She saw that she had arrested his attention, and began:—

The scene is a small woodman's hut, in the pathless solitude of a forest; the time, night; a bitter winter's night, driving snow and wind without, but light and warmth within. Before the glowing embers of the wood fire sits a man—an exile and a sage—in his arms a sleeping child, motherless, and a girl. Suddenly there is a knock at the door—sharp, urgent. The wolves are abroad on such a night, he has heard their distant howlings. Woe to the wayfarer abroad at such an hour! The man shudders, and rising, his child still in his arms, goes to open. On the threshold stands a youth, the snow frozen in his hair and on his clothes—hungry, weary, an outcast, and a fugitive. The man does not ask what he wants, he gives it him without asking—food and shelter. The boy has no home, no father; the man has no son; each finds in the other what was wanting to his life. The sage pours into the boy's soul thirsting for knowledge, the accumulated treasures of half a lifetime of thought, labour, and experience, and he soon surpasses the master, bowed down by sorrow, the world's injustice, and a ruined life; whilst his intellect, keen and clear, grasps the future, and, unembittered by the past, defies it.”

Caroline paused. “Was James Cameron listening?”

He sat very still, his hands crossed over his stick, his chin resting upon them; the expression of his face she could not see.

"Well, they lived thus together many years, how many the story does not say, perhaps eight or ten, for the child was about that age when one dreary winter's night, just such a night as the first—snow and storm without, light and warmth within—father and child sit once more alone before the fire. He whom the exile calls son is absent. Again a knock is heard at the door, faint this time and feeble; another wanderer exposed to the fury of the night, and such a night! The heavy bar is withdrawn, the door bursts open of itself, and an old man, wan, haggard, wild, his white locks blown about his deathlike features, bent beneath the weight of years and a bag he carries in his hand, totters in, and the storm enters in along with him, shrieking, wailing, like the cry of doomed souls departing in fear and agony; darkness and desolation without, light and warmth within! The old man sits down before the fire; he eats, and drinks the wine, strong and good, reserved for the wayfaring guests; fires and confuses his crazed brain; he stretches out his withered hand to the blaze, he places the bag on the hearth between his palsied knees, and opening it spreads out its contents.

"The sage sits apart, silent, and wrapped in thought, his child at his feet. He is dreaming of the past, its hopes, its aspirations; of all that might have been but was not; of all that he had lost, not for want of power, labour, energy, but for want of—gold. Gold! Is he dreaming still? or what is that upon which the flickering fire-light plays—leaping, flashing, dazzling his bewildered sight, burning into his brain. Gold! heaps of gold piled, red and glowing, on his hearth, in the full blaze of those mocking flames. And over it the old man cowers shivering, gloating, shaken with palsy and cupidity; now plunging his skeleton arm elbow deep in the glittering hoard; now lifting and poising the pieces one by one, then letting them drop with a sharp ringing sound. 'Yes, you

are mine,' he cries, 'all mine! I have collected you coin by coin, grinding you out of the lives, the hearts, the souls of men; you are mine, my all, my treasure. No other eye shall see you, no other hand shall touch you; they covet you, they would rob me of you, but they cannot, they dare not! Women, pale and hideous with long weeping and fasting, crouched at my feet and called me father; children, little children, naked and famine stricken, clung to my knees and called me grandfather: I knew what they wanted—You! and I spurned them from me. They tell me I am old old old that I must die and be buried deep down where you cannot follow me; but you are mine, mine only; and I will carry you far away and dig deep down and bury you where none can ever find you. Ha! ha! You shine, you glitter, you dazzle my poor old eyes. Men are fools, they are not worthy of you; they would exchange you for life, for bread, for pleasure; or, madder still, for fame and immortality!' 'Fame and immortality!' He hears the echo of his words, sad and far off—a whisper, a breath, nothing more. He starts, the light has passed from the red gold, the fire has sunk low it is nearly out. The man still sits as before, silent and motionless, his elbow on his knee, his cheek on his hand, his eyes fixed on the dying embers; his child has fallen asleep, her head on his lap, his right hand lies on that head as if in blessing. It is for the last time—it will never so lie again.

Once more Caroline paused and drew a deep breath. "Why do you stop?" asked Winifred, whose attention had, from the first, been arrested by the strangeness of the story, and the voice, the look, the manner, that made of a simple tale a vivid reality; of the scene, the hour, the persons, living images awfully distinct. So deep, indeed, was the spell, that nature herself seemed to lie beneath it; the soft evening breeze seemed suddenly to rise, sigh around them, cold and drear, while the waving branches overhead shivered and bent, as if stirred by the spirit of that dark winter night. Winifred awe-struck and

trembling as with cold, went creeping up to her husband's side, as she always did in times of trouble or fear, and slipped her little hand within his arm, her head leant back upon his shoulder, but her fascinated gaze still fixed upon the dark face, over which swept alternate storm and calm.

Caroline sat apart, her hands clasped, her eyes upraised, she spoke like one inspired. "I stopped," she said in answer to Winifred's question, "because there is a pause in the story, one hour of that winter's night lies wrapped in silence and mystery. It is midnight now, the storm has ceased, darkness and stillness without, darkness and stillness deeper still within, not a sound but the light breathing of the child asleep in her little white bed, her hands folded over her bosom. The old man sleeps too, he has received from his host the midnight cup, the wine was good, and he sleeps soundly, his white hair streaming over the bag of which he has made a pillow. The man still sits by the cold hearth, his elbow on his knee, his cheek on his hand, his eyes fixed on the dead embers, dreaming, not of the past now, but the future, fame and immortality!

"When the son returns, he finds that the sage's dreams are realised, his prayers answered, he is great, for he has that, the want of which alone through half a lifetime has prevented his being so—gold—gold that he calls 'God sent!'

"The youth believes in his master as he does in himself; he asks no questions, and when the half of the hoarded treasure is laid at his feet, he takes it as he has all other benefits—as a son. He is ambitious too, he is young, his intellect strong, his faith in himself and the future, great; the world lies before him.

"The sage listens to his burning words with a smile and—a sigh. He, too, was once young and hopeful; but gold, whatever else it may give cannot restore to him his youth. He exaggerated its power: its want had been the ruin of his life; possessed, it turned to a heap of crumbling ashes in his hand. But he bears this new

sorrow as he has borne the rest—in silence; none know of the hideous presence that haunts him, entering with the night, crouching at his hearth, lying livid and ghastly beneath the winter moonlight, or keeping its lone midnight vigil, separating itself from the darkness, distinct, appalling, with a horrid smile on the set features, a lurid glare in the dead eyes as phosphorescent gleaming in the hair, like gaseous lights shining over new made graves, standing between him and his child, his friend, his God! None sees the ghastly visitant but he, and knowing that there can be no escape from its foul presence for evermore, he has given it a name whereby to call it—*Remorse*. That winter a giant oak, that had defied centuries, was uprooted by the storm; the young man sees it lie, and sighs; on it the man who calls him son once graved his name, saying, with a sad smile, “Now, at least, my name will outlive me.” And how often beneath its spreading branches have they sat and mused. The musings are forgotten, the tree has fallen, the young man sighs.

“That night he has a dream—strange, awful; by that fallen tree on the spot where he so lately stood, and where his footsteps have left deep prints in the now frozen snow, he sees what makes his creeping flesh shrink and quiver with horror. At break of day he stands once more on the spot indicated in his dream, a spade is in his hand, an unutterable horror freezing in his eyes, the pulseless silence of the grey dawn around him.

“It is evening, the sage piles high the blazing fagots; the child has crept to his side, and whilst watching the red cinders as they fall one by one, sings softly to herself. He hears her voice as in a dream, as in a dream, too, he hears the low, souging of the north wind, and the stealthy march of the frost over the spell-bound earth; sometimes, too, he thinks to hear faint tappings at the door, and the wandering of uncertain fingers over its panels, and he knows who stands without! But other sounds are abroad, though he hears them not, the tramp of heavy footsteps over the frozen ground, the silent

approach of Retribution! The man is seized, bound, fettered, without resistance. 'My crime?' he asks. 'Murder.' 'My denouncer?' 'I!' and from out the darkness, on the threshold where, ten years before he had stood an outcast and a fugitive, now, with hands outstretched, sublime in his just wrath, in the strength and glory of his manhood, stands the Betrayer and the Avenger!"

"And is that all?" asked Winifred, when after the last words, which seemed rather to have been breathed than spoken, so faint and solemn had they fallen upon the ear, Caroline stopped.

"That is the end of the story," she answered carelessly: "what remains is but the man's expression of feeling when he finds himself betrayed. I thought of singing it to you, but perhaps you are tired; it is getting late."

"Oh no; please sing it," entreated Winifred. The Doctor said nothing. He had not once moved or looked up; he did not do so now. Caroline Drugh was satisfied; and a smile of triumph flashed in her eyes, and played over her pale lips. "If her words had struck home, what followed should strike deeper still." The doomed man, standing for the last time upon his desecrated hearth, bursts into a passion of sorrow and regret; not for himself—life is more to be dreaded than death; not for the child, who, innocent, must bear the father's guilt; but for his betrayer, and the long life that one act had blasted—the life that, however great, useful, famous, fulfilling the destiny that the sage had himself carved out for him, could never be happy. And then Caroline Drugh, feeling as if her hour of vengeance had come, put into the mouth of the doomed man the denunciation his own curse had called down upon the denouncer of her father—"Confidence misplaced, peace destroyed, the shadow of the past coming between him and every earthly hope, until it left him broken in heart and desolate. So speaks the sage, as the prophet of retribution. Then—as struck by remorse the young man

sinks at his feet—he lays on the bowed head his fettered hands, and blesses him—as the father.”

“And is that all?” asked Winifred once more. “But what became of the young man?”

“The story does not say. He is supposed to go forth with the blessing on his life, but the curse on his soul.”

“I don’t understand. And the child?”

“The story ends there. But shall we not go in? it is getting cold.”

“Yes, it is very cold,” assented Winifred, and she shuddered as she followed Miss Drugh into the house.

The Doctor did not rise, or even move. For some time longer, he kept his motionless attitude; then mechanically he walked away under the shadow of the trees. When he returned to the drawing-room, there was a pallor about his lips, and a contraction of the brow that told of moral or physical pain, though he spoke calmly and cheerfully as usual.

But from that day he never heard Miss Drugh sing again. Whenever she began, he left the room or the spot where she sat, going far away where her voice could not reach him.

CHAPTER XXV.

DR. CAMERON found Russell Square dull enough when left to the tender mercies of Matthews, without wife or child, without even the companionship of old Tip, or the grim, familiar visage of Grace. But he was just then watching a very critical case that required constant day and night attendance; and it was not until, like the Great Physician of old, he had raised his patient—“the only son of his mother, and she was a widow”—from the bed of death, and sent him with well-filled pockets to complete his cure abroad, that he felt himself free to take even a few hours’ holiday. He had been down to Rich-

mond several times during the three months Winifred had already been there, and every time he had found her and the child looking healthier and brighter; but now he had not seen them for more than a fortnight. During that fortnight, one only had missed and watched for him, taking up his post at the gate evening after evening at the hour at which he generally came, his wistful eyes turned towards the road, his ears pricked and attentive to every distant sound, not to be coaxed from the spot until Grace, who would not have deceived even a dog, came and said to him, "Ye maun come home now: he'll na come to-night."

And he believed her, and followed her in. But to-day, when James Cameron opened the gate, no dog was there to meet him. As he walked down the garden, he seemed to miss some tone, some sign of welcome, to which he had been accustomed. The place looked empty and deserted; he felt a strange sense of loneliness creeping over him; and, stopping short, he glanced round, as if seeking some familiar object that was missing.

"Mrs. Cameron has just gone in, sir," said the gardener.

The Doctor nodded, and passed on to the house; but it was not his wife's welcome he had missed.

He found Winifred seated at the drawing-room window, looking very pretty and indolent, a small silken-haired, ribbon-adorned dog, a new acquisition, curled up on her lap.

James Cameron's brow darkened. Why, when he came, did he never find the mother and child together? Poor neglected little thing, left now almost entirely to the nurse.

"Is that you, James?" She held out her hand without rising. Her greeting was just what it might have been if he had left her an hour before. The little dog set up a shrill bark.

"Isn't it a beauty, James?" she asked, hugging it up in the mother-arms, for whose shelter the young child yearned in vain in moments of pain and weariness. "And

he is so clever: he begs and jumps over the stool; and if you put a lump of sugar on his nose, he will catch it in his mouth. His name is Wee-wee. Isn't he pretty?"

"Perhaps; but where is Tip?" he asked, abruptly. He knew now whose welcome it was that he had missed.

Winifred, colouring and confused, stammered out some unintelligible words.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously. "Is he ill?—Is he dead?"

"Yes—that is—Oh, James, don't be angry; but he was so unkind to Wee-wee, and growled at him, and bit him; and I was afraid he would hurt him; and so—"

"And so you locked him up and robbed him of liberty to pamper a new favourite? He shall go back with me to Russell Square."

Winifred looked frightened, and repeated her words,—
"Don't be angry, James; I did not lock him up; but—he was so old and cross and ugly, and he would have killed Wee-wee, I'm sure he would; and so"—She broke off hurriedly. The Doctor's stern eye was upon her. He was very pale; and as she hesitated, he finished the sentence for her. "You had him killed?"

Her silence was answer sufficient. He turned to go; but at the door he paused. "Where is he buried?"

"Buried! oh, I don't know. I told the gardener—I don't know what he did with him. I did not ask."

Without another word he left the room.

Winifred, glad to have got over the dreaded confession so much more easily than she had expected, watched her husband with a light heart as he walked slowly down the gravel path. She saw him stop and speak to the gardener, and then pass on to where, under an acacia tree was a mound not unlike a new-made grave. Had the man been more pitiful than she and respected the faithful dead? He stood there so long that, tired at last of watching, she put on her hat, and, calling Wee-wee to follow her, went out to join him.

By the acacia-tree stood a beautiful rose-bush, the

pride of the garden, and just then in full bloom. Dr. Cameron, turning away at last from his old friend's grave, saw it, and put out his hand as if to gather one of the blossoms, but Winifred sprang eagerly forward, and arrested his hand. "Don't gather my roses, James; this is my favourite bush; the gardener says there is not such another in Richmond. I count the roses every morning, and could not spare one."

He started on hearing her voice, and, by an involuntary movement shook himself free of her retaining clasp, turning on her at the same time such a look as she had never seen on his face before, and which she never afterwards forgot,—a look of mingled reproach, aversion, even horror, that made her shrink back appalled. As she stood before him, white and trembling, the old gleam of terror—the first expression he had ever seen in her eyes, came back to them once more. His look had terrified her, and had awakened a new feeling towards her husband,—that of fear.

"Do not be afraid, Winifred; everything that you value, even to a flower, is sacred in your husband's eyes; he would not rob you of it." He spoke calmly—even gently, and then turned and left her, not knowing that his countenance had betrayed him—that the one glimpse into his troubled soul had destroyed the confidence of years, and completed the work of estrangement that Caroline Drugh had begun. Never again did his wife come creeping up to him in moments of trouble or excitement, stealing her little hand into his, and looking up to him as her natural protector, never again did she open her heart to him pouring out in her childish trust her every thought and feeling. The last link that bound them together was broken. It was Caroline Drugh who had given Mrs. Cameron the pretty curly-haired dog; was it she, too, who sealed the fate of poor old Tip, grudging the man she hated the love that he himself had said could not well be spared from his life?

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARY was elbow-deep in dough, and her apron, face, and even the neatly-braided hair, were whitened with flour; for the flies were tormenting her as only flies have the happy art of tormenting, and her attacks upon them fell recklessly now here, now there, a snowy shower following every wave of her hand.

Mrs. Thornton entered the kitchen.

"Oh, mother!" cried poor Mary, half laughing, half crying, "the flies are driving me mad; the bread will be quite spoilt, I know, and father will be so angry. I wouldn't mind if they didn't always come on my nose, but that tickles so."

Another wave of the hand; another descent of the snowy meal.

"Here is a letter from Cyril, dear."

Mary uttered a joyful exclamation.

"Oh dear!—and I must wait till the dough is washed off my hands. Here, Martha! some hot water—very hot—it will get it off better."

The cleansing operation performed, Mary held out a hand red and swollen from the scalding water into which she had so recklessly plunged it, and then perching herself on the dresser, her feet dangling, her face all aglow, she opened her letter.

"He's coming, mother!" she cried, impetuously, after devouring the first few lines. "He is not going to Switzerland after all; he is coming here for a whole month, and soon—very soon."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Thornton, flushing up with surprise and pleasure, "then I will go and tell father;" for she could never, somehow, realise either joy or sorrow until it had been shared with father.

"Why, what's in the wind now?" coolly observed the farmer, who, up to his knees in water, was superintending the cleaning out of a ditch.

"Cyril is coming, and soon—very soon, Mary says."

"Hem," said the farmer, who, not to lose time, was knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and preparing to refill it. "I wonder," he continued, with grim impatience, when that boy will learn to know his own mind two days running. Now he is rushing off to Switzerland, and when you expect to hear of his having reached the top of Mont Blanc with a mule, or the bottom with a somersault, you find that he has changed his mind, and is going to honour us with a visit." And Farmer Thornton, having now filled his pipe, replaced it in his mouth, and returned to his work; while Mrs. Thornton, satisfied that he knew as much as she did, hurried back to the kitchen.

Mary still sat on the dresser, her feet, cased in boots that would have sent a shudder down the back of a sensitive London belle, swaying to and fro, and beating an impatient tattoo on the boards. Her eyes were still fixed on the letter, but the flush of delight had faded out of her face.

"Well, dear, when does he come?"

"Next month, perhaps; he does not say for certain." There was a short silence, then she said, but without looking up, "And a friend of his—Mrs. Leigh—you know, mother, the lady who has been so kind to him, and about whom he has so often written, is coming down too—that is if Beckham Cottage is still to let; but read the letter yourself, and then you will see what he says."

Mrs. Thornton dived down into her pockets in search of her spectacles; and having had them in her hand half-a-dozen times at least, she gave up the search as hopeless, and declaring that she must have left them in her bedroom after all,—though she could have sworn to having put them in one of her pockets,—for Mrs. Thornton's pockets were legion; she mildly suggested that Mary should read her what Cyril said; "for you see, dear," she added, "he does not write such a pretty clear hand as in his copy books (which had all been religiously preserved among the family relics), but I

daresay it is the writing so many sermons that has made all his letters go the wrong way."

Mary read.

"Dear Mary." Here she paused. Why did he not call her Birdie?—it was so much prettier, and he always used to.

"Well, dear?" suggested Mrs. Thornton, finding that the letter had come to a dead stop.

Mary started, coloured, and began again.

"DEAR MARY,

"You will be surprised to hear that I have changed my mind, and do not intend going to Switzerland after all. The truth is, that a kind friend of mine, Mrs. Charlton Leigh, of whom you have so often heard me speak, being now in a very delicate state of health, and having been recommended pure country air, has taken it into her head to visit our beautiful county, whose praises I have so often sung. Should Beckham cottage still be to be let, it would do exactly. Pray let me know at once. Mrs. Leigh would take it for the summer, and I should come down for a month to see her fairly installed, and have the pleasure of introducing her to all the dear home circle with whom she is already, by hearsay, so familiar. I need not add, dear Mary, how much I look forward to seeing you all again, and how glad I am of an excuse for going home, than which no spot on earth is dearer to

"Your affectionate cousin,

"CYRIL THORNTON."

The letter read, both were silent. Mrs. Thornton waited as usual for Mary to speak first. She had to wait some time, but hers was a patient nature; at last Mary said, but in a low absent tone, as if speaking to herself: "He is looking forward to seeing us all again, isn't he mother?"

"Yes, of course, dear, he is."

"But he would not have come if it had not been for

Mrs. Leigh; it is for her sake, not ours, he comes, eh, mother?"

There was something of wounded feeling both in the words and tone.

"Well, you see, dear, Mrs. Leigh has been such a kind friend to him, and our Cyril always was of a grateful nature, and if she is ill, poor lady, and wishes to come down here, he could not do less than accompany her; and no doubt, as he says, he was very glad of an excuse for coming home instead of going up those dreadful, dangerous mountains, which is really providential, for he might have fallen down and broken his neck, and then what would have become of him, or of us either? It would have been such a dreadful blow: and he never would have thought of it only, as he himself told us, or somebody else, it is expected of every young man, more especially London curates, that they should go to Switzerland to see the sun rise, which he might do just as well here; but anyhow, I am sure he is as glad to come as we shall be to have him."

Good Mrs. Thornton, though the simplest and most artless creature in the world, had often the knack of saying the right thing at the right moment; she had done so now, and as Mary sprang down from the dressor, and thrusting the letter into the bosom of her dress, returned to her bread making, every shade of mortification and disappointed affection had vanished from her face.

When the farmer heard of the Leigh invasion, he muttered something, that, not being very amiable, was fortunately lost in the depths of his beard or the fumes of his pipe. Harry gave a prolonged whistle, and put on a look of profound wisdom and penetration.

"And the widow, is it an old or a young party?"

"About as old as dear mother there."

"Glad to hear it," he remarked, sententiously, "for Cy is just the spoon to go and fall in love with a widow."

"For shame, Hal!" cried both the ladies.

Hal chuckled and rubbed his hands gleefully; he dearly loved teasing the women, and this could not be done more effectually than by having a sly hit at the absent hero.

Beckham cottage was still to be let; and Mary under Cyril's direction, and in Mrs. Leigh's name took it for three months, had the garden put in order, superintended the arrangement of the furniture that was sent down from London, and then wrote and told Cyril that all was ready.

"Well, Mary, and how does it all look down there?"

These were almost Cyril's first words as he jumped down from the dog-cart that had been sent to the station to meet him.

"Down where, dear?"

"Down at the cottage; I hope all my directions have been attended to."

"I have done my best, Cyril; I hope your friend will be satisfied."

Mary felt that her words and tone were cold, but she could not help it. Something in Cyril's careless manner, in his careless greeting, disappointed and pained her. He had not been home for so long, he might have seemed more pleased to see her. There was something, too, in his appearance, that was strange and unfamiliar; something fashionable, almost foppish, that made of him another man.

They walked together down the lane, but not hand in hand as they had always done before; and though his talk was eager and animated, it was upon indifferent subjects that could have no particular interest for either.

In the porch they found father, mother, and Hal, and Mary leaving him to their more noisy welcome, slipped quietly away and into the kitchen.

"Master Cyril is come, Martha," she said to the servant, "and is very hungry, we must get him something to eat."

Then she busied herself with tea and toast, cutting ham and frying eggs, and Martha watching her furtively,

shook her head, and wondered as she rattled among the tea things, what there had been between her and Master Cyril, that she was so silent and downhearted.

And what had there been? A disappointment, nothing more; as in nine cases out of ten, the reality had been something quite other than the anticipation. She had so looked forward to his coming, counting the days and hours, eager, happy, impatient; that night she had not been able to close her eyes for joy; the day had seemed interminable; she had fairly worried father and Hal out of the house, and would have worked herself up into a perfect fever of impatience, had she not had mother's patient ear, in which to pour out her doubts and fears. "Did she certainly think he would come? had he not perhaps lost the train; he had done so once before; it was getting very late; did she not hear the carriage?"

Long before the time at which he could possibly be expected, she had stationed herself at the garden gate; she must now as ever be the first to welcome Cyril home; hers must be his first greeting, the first pressure of his hand, his first kiss; for dearly though the others might love him, she felt that she loved him best of all. And now the first meeting was over, he had come, he was there among them, and from time to time she caught the sound of his voice, his joyous laugh: both so like Harry's, and yet to her, how different. He had come home, and not for a day or even a week, but for a whole long month, that counted by hours, and every hour must be counted when Cyril was there, seemed an eternity. And yet she felt chilled and disappointed. She had somehow expected things to be so different, how, she could not herself have told; but she felt, as Martha had expressed it—downhearted.

"Lor', Miss! why if there isn't the toast a burning all up to a cinder."

So it was. The tears that had been slowly gathering in Mary's eyes had prevented her seeing it, they fell, and then her thoughts took a more cheerful turn. She cut another slice of bread, poked the fire, and laughed

to think how silly she had been. To cry because Cyril had forgotten to take her hand! In London, of course, people did not take hands, and it was so long since they had met, how could she expect him to remember their old country ways. But they would all come back, and then they would be so happy together; a whole month! four weeks! thirty-one days! Yes, there were thirty-one days in that month!

‘Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November, February’s days are twenty-eight alone; all the rest have thirty-one.’

How good of Cyril to choose a month that had thirty-one days!

She lingered over the preparations for tea, hoping that he would come to look for her, he always had, and that stolen chat by the kitchen-fire, or when warm, as now, at the kitchen-door, possessed for her a peculiar charm.

But to-day she waited in vain; he did not come.

When, tea-tray in hand, she went into the hall, she found it deserted; father was in the stables, mother in the dairy, Hal and Cyril had gone off, no one knew where. Another disappointment, another heartache as foolish as the rest, no doubt, but that did not mend matters. Restless and dissatisfied, she could not settle to anything, but wandered in and out with a heavy cloud on her usually smooth open brow.

At last she remembered a beautiful jasmine spray she had seen climbing up the porch, she ran to gather it, and as she laid it all sparkling with dew on Cyril’s plate, her face seemed to catch some of its fairy light, the cloud passed away, she was her own bright self again, and a very bright self it was that ran to meet the brothers as they came arm-in-arm down the garden.

“Oh, Cyril, where have you been? why did you not wait for me? And tea has been ready ever so long, and will be quite spoilt.”

“So I told him,” said Hal, shaking his head with

marked disapproval; "but, bless you, he was just mad to get down to the cottage, though I answered for its not running away in the night."

"You were down at the cottage!" Disappointment number three, she had so counted upon an evening stroll there, she and Cyril alone.

"And what do you think, Pol," continued Hall; "after all the pains you took, Cy has done nothing but grumble and find fault; it is not good enough; not elegant enough, forsooth, for the fine London widow."

Mary seeing an angry flush overspread Cyril's face, adroitly changed the conversation, and father coming up, he and Hal went off together, so that Mary had her cousin all to herself, for a time at least.

"And are you really very glad to be home, dear?" she asked, as soon as they were alone.

"Oh, Mary, you cannot think how glad!" he answered, warmly. "The dear old place! how often have I seen it in my dreams. Night after night I have fancied myself wandering through the dark Alton Woods, or standing on Beckham Bridge, looking down into the cool waters below. I am sure no home-sick schoolboy ever longed for his holidays as I did for mine."

The fact of the case was, that for the last month Mrs. Leigh had been away at a fashionable watering-place, and Cyril left behind, realized to the full the impossibility of living without Miriam; and, sure as he was of her aunt's approval of his suit, he would have written the confession of his love, had not the hope held out to him by Mrs. Leigh of a month to be spent all together in the country, given him a hope sweeter still, the hope of hearing from the girl's own dear lips, an avowal of the love he had hitherto only read in her smiles and blushes. To have to wait a whole month for this avowal was a trial indeed, but it was over now, a few hours more and she would be there—his only—his, he fondly dreamt, for ever. No wonder then that he spoke in a tone of deep, even passionate feeling. No wonder, too, that poor Mary, who never dreamt of the home of his

childhood being connected in Cyril's mind with any other companionship than her own, felt proud and satisfied.

Another circumstance, trifling enough in itself—but do not trifles make up the sum of human things—served to strengthen her in her delusion. As she brought in the tea, which she had set to keep hot on the kitchen-hob, she found Cyril sitting at the table, his head resting on one hand, and in the other the jasmine spray, on which his eye was fixed with so rapt an intensity, that he did not even see her until she came up softly behind him, and laid her hand on his shoulder. Then, startled and confused, he coloured violently, and dropped the flower at his feet.

Mary picked it up, and, fastening it in his button hole, said, playfully—

“You must not despise my poor little flower; don't you remember how I once sent you a spray, and you told me how happy it had made you, and that you had put it under your pillow, and it had made you dream of being down here. I have called it Cyril's flower ever since.”

“Despise it!” he said, only catching at her first words, and stooping, he caressed it with lingering fondness and smiling lips.

Miriam had worn a spray of jasmine in her bonnet the first time he had ever seen her, but this Mary could not know, so she went to bed happy and hopeful, and before she fell asleep she had made a mental calculation by which she proved to her entire satisfaction that it would be possible and easy for her and Cyril to live, aye and comfortably too, upon their joint means, but it was not enough for her to see this, Cyril must be made to see it too.

The next morning, the first up as usual in the house, at five o'clock on her way down, she paused at Cyril's door. Was he up? She listened, all was silent. Should she wake him? perhaps he would be vexed if she did not—he had always so enjoyed an early morning stroll with her before the dew was off the grass, and the rest

of the world about. She knocked gently—no answer. Poor fellow, she thought, perhaps he is still fast asleep, it would be cruel to disturb him, and she went softly down.

Her first care after a due attendance to household matters, was to gather a monster nosegay of her choicest flowers, and she was just tying it up when she caught sight of Cyril at the other end of the garden, walking slowly up and down.

So he had gone out after all—and alone!

“Cyril!”—she called out—“Cyril.”

He turned, and came towards her, but with lingering steps.

“Why where have you been, dear? I thought you were still fast asleep, and had not the heart to wake you.”

“I have seen the sunrise from Colney Hill, it was glorious!”

“Oh, why 'did you not wait for me? I should have so enjoyed the walk.”

He gave his shoulders a careless shrug.

“I forgot you were such an early bird, and I must make the most of every hour, you know.”

“And so must we,” she said, passing her arm within his and looking up into his face with eyes brimful of love. “As long as you are here you belong to us, and have no right whatever to yourself—do you hear, sir?”

He laughed, and shook back the waving hair that the fresh morning breeze had blown about his face. Exercise had flushed his cheek, and his dreamy blue eyes had in them an ardent light that illumined the whole countenance—together he looked eager, happy, radiant.

“How handsome you are, Cyril!” cried Mary suddenly, in undisguised admiration. “I declare I find you handsomer every time I see you.”

He laughed again, and bent down on her, well pleased, his deep blue eyes. Flattery never comes amiss, whatever may have been written or said to the contrary.

“But now that I look closer,” she continued, “I find

you rather wild and not at all clerical—your tie is quite on one side. I suppose you waited for me to arrange it for you. Do you remember how as children this was always my work, and how angry I got when you would not stand still, particularly on a Sunday, when I wished to make you more than usually smart?"

"No, I never remember your getting angry, you always were the best tempered little sister in the world."

It was the first time he had called her *sister*, but she saw nothing strange in the word, it was to her only another term of endearment.

She arranged his tie with lingering fingers; she half thought he would put his arm round her, perhaps even, as they stood so close together, he might stoop down and kiss her; he had done so many a time before—why not?—were they not cousins—and more—much more.

But Cyril did not take advantage of his cousinship or of the privilege accorded him—the healthy, good-humoured face before him, possessing about as little attraction in his eyes as that of Martha, the dairy-maid.

"Halloa!" he cried, catching sight of the monster nosegay that Mary had put together with so much reckless prodigality. "Why, what have you there? A new kind of philanthropic scarecrow to dazzle the birds instead of frightening them?"

"I thought it would look nice and bright in the little drawing-room in Beckham cottage," said Mary, casting a rueful glance on the despised bouquet, for which she had so generously despoiled her favourite flower-beds.

"So it will, Birdie, and I am much obliged to you for thinking of it."

But she needed no thanks, the old familiar pet name was the sweetest reward he could have given her.

Mrs. Leigh was to arrive in the evening, and Cyril, as in duty bound, went down to the cottage about the time at which she was expected, to welcome her, and offer such help as might be needed.

"And you will be back as soon as possible, won't

you, dear?" she said in the easy playful tone of one privileged and beloved.

She had accompanied him half way, and now stood leaning over the stile looking after him.

Long after he had passed out of sight she remained there, wrapped in thought. The air was sultry and oppressive, not the faintest breeze stirred the river, or the dark alders growing beside it. Perhaps the atmosphere had a depressing influence upon her spirits; certain it is that there stole over her an unusual sadness, a feeling of loneliness and desertion such as she had never felt before. Why did not Cyril ask her at once to be his wife? she thought, with impatient longing—there was nothing to wait for—did he know how comfortably they could manage—was it for her sake he hesitated? What had she to fear except the losing him for another long, long year. Had Mrs. Leigh arrived—would he soon be back? She would wait there for him, and then they would have a row in the boat right down to Crossway Island. She had learnt to row since he was last there, and Hal had said she was a famous oar. So now Cyril might sit quite still, or lie down, as he used sometimes to do when Hal rowed them, with his head in her lap, looking up at the clouds and telling her of the wonderful things he saw in them.

And from this her thoughts passed on to other things—to the time when they should be as one, and there would be no more partings.

Suddenly she caught the sound of voices on the other side of the river—one of the voices was that of Cyril, the other clear and ringing, was unknown to her, it must be that of Mrs. Leigh—perhaps he was bringing her to the farm. Seized with a sudden fit of shyness, she sprang up and flew rather than ran across the meadow, calling out, as she bounced all flushed and breathless into the dairy,—“Oh mother—mother, Cyril is coming—and Mrs. Leigh——” And not waiting for further explanations she escaped to her own room.

She had not however been there long when she heard

mother calling her, and much talking and laughing in the porch below told her of the visitor's arrival. She must go down or Cyril might be vexed—what would the fine London widow be like—did she know all about Cyril and herself—had he told her?—if so, as she was fond of him, she must be anxious to see the girl he had chosen for his wife. Hastily smoothing her hair with her hand, and pulling off the large checked apron without which she was never seen except on highdays and holydays, she ran downstairs; but arrived almost within sight of the group, and quite within sight of good mother Thornton's broad back; which blocked up the doorway, she suddenly remembered that her cuffs were soiled, and that it would have looked better to put on a brooch. Should she go back? She paused irresolute on the last stair, not daring to advance or retreat—pressing close against the wall, and trying by furtive glances round its angle to catch sight of Cyril, and his friend who was talking and laughing gaily, and seemed already quite at home among them. Mother happening at last to turn and catch sight of her, she was obliged to come forward, which she did timidly enough, and blushing to the tips of her ears.

After a brief introduction, her hand was taken and cordially pressed; and venturing to look up, she saw a tall, stout, handsome woman, dressed in rich black silk, with bright dark eyes and fine teeth (none the less fine for not being her own), and by her side a young girl—slight, graceful, radiantly pretty, with dimples in each rosy cheek, at the corners of the pouting lips, in the soft round chin—with hazel eyes that danced and sparkled beneath the broad brim of her leghorn hat.

Mary glanced involuntarily from her to Cyril, and the look she caught bent upon the stranger's face told her all. It told her that the dreams of years, the hopes of the future, the memories of the past, were lost to her for ever! She made a violent effort to conquer her emotion. The pretty stranger said something about a wish to see the farm-yard. She was so fond of poultry!

and, though it was to Mary she had addressed herself, Cyril sprang eagerly forward, and offered his escort. As he did so, Mary saw their eyes meet. Oh, how full his were of mute adoration! The young girl gave him a half-shy, half-coquettish look; then smiled, blushed, and with a laughing promise to her companion to be back directly, they went off together. Mary watched them out of sight, then slipped quietly away; and soon, to her own surprise, not knowing how she had come there, she found herself kneeling by her bed, her face buried in the counterpane, sobbing and crying as if her heart would break.

Rare emotions are all-powerful. Mary, who had not had a good cry for years, wept all the more wildly, the more passionately now. She had been wronged—wickedly, cruelly wronged. How could he be so unkind, so faithless! Were they not as good as married? Was not her life bound up in his? What was her future without him? She had none. Had she not only an hour ago sat dreaming of the time when he would be all her own? and now he was lost to her—more effectually lost to her than if he lay dead and cold in the churchyard; for then, at least, she would have his grave and the memory of his love; and now she had nothing—nothing! He did not love her; he had never loved her. He had never once, all the years they had lived together, looked at her as he had looked at the girl whom he had brought down there to make her miserable. “Oh, I can’t bear it,” she cried, “I can’t—I can’t,” and she fell to sobbing and crying more wildly, more bitterly than ever, and wishing herself dead, that she might never look upon his face again. It was a perfect paroxysm of grief and anger; and it had reached its height when the door softly opened and some one entered.

It was Mrs. Thornton, who stood awhile spellbound on the threshold. That Mary—bright cheerful, even-tempered Mary, who was at once the calming and guiding spirit of the house, should be there crying her heart out on the ground, was a thing so monstrous, so

unprecedented, that she hardly dared credit the evidence of her senses. Then, the motherly impulse to comfort, overcoming all other scruples, she raised the weeping girl, and, sitting down by the bed, drew the poor swollen face on to her lap, and, folding her arms lovingly around her, lavished on her all the endearing epithets with which we try to console a sorrowing child. In sorrow are we not all as children—the strongest and bravest of us? Be her grief what it might, she must not pour it out on the hard ground when she had a mother's breast on which to weep.

"Oh, mother, mother!" cried the poor girl, half wild with sorrow, and hardly knowing what she said. "How could he be so cruel, so wicked, so false!"

"Who, dear?" asked the good gentle soul, shocked at the vehement passion of her words. But Mary did not even hear her.

"How could he love me? how could I think he would? She is so pretty, so grand, so different from me; but I did not know! I could not guess; and he always spoke as if—as if he loved me. Oh, what a fool I was!"

Mother knew all now; but she knew, too, that any attempt at consolation would be worse than vain; so she only pressed the shame-bowed head closer to her bosom; and something in the mute but eloquent embrace told Mary that there was one, at least, who understood and sympathised with her, and in whose heart her miserable secret would be held sacred. After that, she wept less bitterly; the storm had spent itself; there was comfort in the very clasp of those warm, loving arms around her; and before Mother left, having first seen her into bed, she had even won a half-smile.

She had not been gone five minutes when Hal came tearing up, three steps at a time. The fact was, that for Mary to have even a head-ache was a thing so unusual, that it upset the whole household.

"Halloa! Polly! I say, Poll, why what's the row now?" he cried out, thumping at the door with an energy that would have awakened the Seven Sleepers. "Father is

in a pretty way, and would have come himself, but that mother told him you had best be kept quiet; and so, you see, I thought I would just run up. Not much the matter, eh?"

"Nothing at all, dear old fellow," said poor Mary, trying to speak in her usual cheerful tone: "a stupid head-ache, and mother put me to bed. I shall be all right to-morrow."

"Ay, do, there's a good girl." And away he clattered; but, when half way downstairs, returned. "I say, Polly," he said, in a loud whisper, "that's a stunning fine girl, that niece of Mrs. Leigh's, aint she? and we know who's sweet upon her, don't we, Polly? But why he kept it dark, I'm sure I don't know; only he always was a sly fellow. He's down at the cottage now; feared they might encounter a bull, or a frog, or a stile. Such a careful shepherd of the flock, particularly of the pretty ewe-lambs! But there's mother calling out to me to come down, and not make such a noise. A noise, indeed! as if I wasn't just the quietest fellow in the world. Well, good-night, Polly."

"Good-night, Hal," answered a very faint, smothered voice. "When you see Cyril, bid him good-night from me."

"All right!" And away he went to set father's mind at ease by telling him that there was nothing the matter with Polly, who was as merry as a cricket.

When, more than an hour afterwards, Mrs. Thornton, on her way up to bed, paused at Mary's door to bid her good-night, she found her sitting at the window, huddled up in the counterpane.

"Why, bless the child!" she exclaimed, amazed, "I hoped to find you asleep, dear."

"It is so pleasant here—so cool and fresh," she answered, deprecatingly. "And when the moon is up I cannot sleep; but see, it will soon be gone, and then I will go to bed."

The mother's heart ached to leave her there alone with her sorrow and the solemn moonlight; but Mrs.

Thornton was wrong. Mary was not alone. Another was with her, upholding and strengthening her in the fiery furnace that was to try her; and His form "was like the Son of God."

The Thornton household had long retired to rest when Cyril returned. Mary saw him come; she saw him walking in the moonlight down the garden; she saw him lean over the low wall, his eyes turned towards Beckham Cottage until, the moon sinking behind Colney Hill, night hid it from his sight. Then he entered the house; and, as Mary heard the door close behind him, she crept back to her bed, and, in darkness and silence, knelt down beside it.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ONCE, perhaps, in the course of a long life it is given to some of us, poor predestined mortals, to enjoy perfect happiness, or at least what we take to be such; as for real happiness or real anything else, modern reasoners have proved pretty plainly (or fancy they have) that there is no such thing. There is no such thing as colour, it is the eye alone creates it; there is no such thing as love, it is mere animal magnetism, and if you ask what is animal magnetism, you find that reduced to the law of reason, there is no such thing. Providence, too, is not Providence; there is no such thing, it is nature or chance, and both nature and chance analysed and dissected, are discovered not to be nature and chance, but something else. Of course, too, there are no such things as time or eternity, reasoners have reasoned away both, and substituted for the mysterious but gloriously illumined future of the soul the fathomless abyss of annihilation. But besides being denied the possession of a soul, we are denied the possession of a heart, at least as a feeling organ. Nonsense! cry the enlightened. "You feel with the stomach, and only

with the stomach; as for good hearts, noble hearts, there is no such thing. Say a good digestion, a noble constitution; these are the things to be proud of, for these things make the man." Well, then, let us own once for all, for we hate wranglings and disputings, that there is no such thing as anything, and having made this concession, everything remains much as it was before our modern reasoners lived, and scoffed. The majority of mankind believe in an over-ruling Providence, and will to the end of time; their belief being condemned as a mere vulgar superstition, does not prevent its being their consoler in sorrow, an antidote against the poisoned injustice of the world; through it they live contented, or at least resigned, and die with the light of eternity upon their brow. They believe, too, in the reality of love and virtue—folly and delusion!—cry the enlightened. Perhaps, yet by such belief alone are nations formed, and posterity improved; by it from animals we become men, great and good, heroes, patriots, martyrs; and, better still than all, worthy heads of families, wise masters, trusty friends.

In one sense, indeed, there is nothing real in life, for we see nothing as it really is; faith alone makes it such to us; believe, and your article of faith becomes a reality.

Thus it is that those who believe themselves to be happy are really so, and being so, they fondly hope that their happiness, as fleeting as it is bright, will last for ever. If they but paused to reflect, they would see that this cannot be, that happiness long enjoyed ceases to be happiness, and becomes satiety, which is something widely different. When looking back upon lost happiness through the vista of years, we see how illusive it was, and with the sigh or the sneer its memory invokes, we fling at that poor deluded self who believed in it, the half-pitying, half-contemptuous epithet—poor fool!

Cyril was happy, happy in loving, and in the certainty of being beloved; happy in the present, doubly happy in the thought of the future. To wander with Miriam,

arch, playful, bewitching, through tangled woods where the help of his hand was needed at every turn; through sun-flooded meadows, along cool river banks and deep shaded lanes, was happiness enough. To wander with the same Miriam, bright and bewitching still, but matured, softened, perfected, through all the shifting scenes of life, was happiness greater yet, Love, to be happiness, must be free from doubt and fear. Cyril's was thus free; he no more doubted of Miriam's affection and her aunt's approval, than he did that a glorious Midsummer sun shone overhead, or that a ripe and glowing landscape lay around. Altogether his life was bright with a new glory: it spoke out in his eyes, in his voice, in the ready laugh, the elastic step; he was handsomer, stronger, nobler; he gloried, he exulted in it, and threw into it all the force and energy he brought to bear upon anything he had in hand. It inspired him, yet made him too restless for work; wild snatches of poetry, of thought, flashed through his brain, rich, eloquent, original; and he knew that they were beautiful, more beautiful than anything he had ever written, but he could no more have caught and chained them down to paper than he could have captured the sunbeams that played about Miriam's chestnut curls.

He had at first intended speaking to Mrs. Leigh at once, on her arrival at the cottage, and then with her consent, to Miriam, thus making the month's holiday the dawn of their new life, a sort of honeymoon in advance; but with the dreamy idealism of the poet, secure in his love, he deferred from day to day the avowal that would make public the sacred feelings now so wondrously veiled in shadow and mystery. He hoped, too, that close intimate companionship would draw nearer to him the pretty creature of whom as yet he knew so little; that it would be as it were an education of the heart preparing her for the future they were to pass together; and she, as if guessing his purpose, grew daily softer, quieter, more subdued; still bright and merry, and indulging at times in her old wild spirits, but only by fits and

starts. Sometimes she would walk by his side wrapped in silence, from which she would start at a word, with a blush and a thrill; laughter and dimples were always ready to break out, but in repose there lay a shade of earnest thought over her features, and her eyes too had over them now and then an unwonted veil of shyness and reserve. All this Cyril saw with wondering delight, and he exulted in the thought that his hand had been the first to unlock the deep founts of tenderness in that young heart.

Unfortunately, so imperfect are our earthly relations, that it is seldom but that the happiness of the one is the sorrow of another. There is a silent and often undreamt-of competition going on that makes the success of the fortunate competitor, the failure, and not unfrequently the ruin, of some less fortunate rival. Little did Cyril think in the blind delirium of his love of that other heart so brave and patient in its suffering.

When Mary, the day after Mrs. Leigh's arrival at Beckham Cottage, made her appearance at the breakfast table, there was a general exclamation of dismay at her pale cheeks and swollen lids; but as she seemed in her usual cheerful spirits, ate with apparent appetite, and accounted for her late indisposition by the fact of her having stood so long with uncovered head in the full blaze of a noonday sun, their fears were allayed.

Breakfast over, Cyril strolled away; Mary did not ask him where he was going; she did not even watch where he went; she had done so the night before for the last time, she had then told herself that their lives must henceforth be apart, the wider the better.

Mother Thornton, on whose usually placid face lay the shadow of a troubled thought, was in the kitchen-garden, occupied in shelling the peas she had just gathered, when Mary came up softly behind her and said, abruptly speaking in a quick, resolute tone, "Mother, what I said yesterday was very foolish and wicked, and I had no right to say it. Cyril never gave me the right—he is not to blame—he never meant to marry me—all that

he said was a mere jest, and I should have taken it as such; and it was very wrong of me, too, to say that I was ashamed of having loved him; there is nothing to be ashamed of; I have thought it all over, and I see that there is not; I have done nothing wrong, nor has Cyril; he loved me as a sister, and it was no fault of mine that—I loved him better than a brother; that is all over now. I am his sister Mary, and he is my brother Cyril. I must always call him so, mother, and then all will be right. But he is not to blame—he has done nothing wrong.”

“No, dear? Well, I am very glad to hear it; I could not bear to think that he had deceived you—that would have been so very wicked, you know, and he was always so fond of you. Well, I hope it will be all right, as you say; but . . .” And she turned and looked up wistfully into Mary’s face; then, as she saw how calm and steadfast that face was, her own cleared.

“Yes, it will be all right; it *must* be.” The quiet, determined tone, made of the simple words a solemn resolve. “Cyril will marry Miss Edgestone, and none but you must ever know how wicked and unjust I was yesterday.”

Mrs. Thornton sighed; it was the first disguise she had ever had from her husband, at least since that old one now so old as almost to be forgotten, when she had tried, as a comely lass, to hide her love from the handsome young farmer, who had read it plainly enough in her eyes long before her lips avowed it. But though she sighed, she knew it must be so. She took the poor girl’s secret into her keeping as a sacred deposit, and Mary knew it was safe in the mother’s heart.

From that day, a new life began for Mary—a life of struggle and self-conquest. A great sorrow had fallen upon her, but it was the easier to bear, from the fact of her having looked it honestly in the face, and grappled with it from the first. That is the surest way of outliving and rising above a sorrow, however great. Wrestle with it as Jacob did with the angel till break of day,

and it turns to a blessing. It may try your strength to the utmost, and after it you may go halting all your life long—no matter, you have prevailed. If your hair does not turn white in that one night, it will not turn white at all; if your heart do not break in the struggle, it will not break at all; it is the daily fretting and pining, the petty, hourly struggle that wears out life, that scars the face, and wrinkles the brow, and sears and embitters the heart, making us old before the time.

Mary had suffered, but she had conquered, and if there was a change in her, it was so little apparent, that none but a practised eye could have detected it. Her cheek was less rosy, perhaps, her step less light; she no longer teased Hal so unmercifully, or played such wild games with the watch-dogs, or was so ready to laugh at nothing—but what of that?—she was cheerful still, and so it was no wonder that neither Cyril, nor father, nor Hal, who were so occupied with other matters, did not perceive that anything was amiss. Mother did, it is true all too plainly, and it made her voice more tender in addressing the girl, and her step lighter when intruding upon her solitude, as if there were something almost sacred in her presence—and so indeed there was.

At first both Mrs. Leigh and Miriam showed a decided wish to cultivate Mary's acquaintance, and were particular in their attentions—inviting her to the cottage, coming constantly to the farm, including her in all their walks and excursions; but she withdrew as much as possible from their society, generally contriving to be out of the way when they came, though always gentle and friendly when they happened to meet, and manifesting her goodwill by choice gifts of eggs, flowers, and fruit.

“Why do you never accompany us in our walks, Miss Roe?” said Miriam one day as they stood all together awaiting the cessation of a heavy thunder shower. “You can't think how delightful they are; Mr. Thornton and I sometimes have such fun, particularly when I get afraid of the cows and frogs, and the great beetles that fly about at night. I am so silly, and Aunty always laughs

at me; but she need not, for she is just as bad as I am. Only fancy, the other day she screamed because I ran after her with a daddy-long-legs; the idea of being afraid of a poor harmless daddy, just because it has long, ugly legs!" And she laughed back at her aunt, who stood behind her, shuddering at the recollection of her past sufferings, and tapping her playfully with the tip of her ivory-handled parasol, said, "You stupid old darling!" And there was a world of fondness in the saucy words. She was such a soft, caressing creature, was Miriam Edgestone.

"Please, Miss Roe," she said, turning again to Mary, who sat at work in the window, "do come with us to-morrow. Mr. Thornton takes us to the forest—to a real large forest. I never was in one in my life; it must be such fun; do come, will you?"

She spoke in her most coaxing tone, but Cyril here broke in, answering for his cousin. "Oh, Miss Edgestone, you don't know what it would cost poor Mary to say Yes. Every hour spent away from the farm is a drop of her heart's blood, I assure you."

He spoke jestingly, but anyone less sensitive even than Mary would have seen that her society was not wanted; indeed, he had grand projects for that day's excursion, of which neither of the girls knew anything, and with which his cousin's presence would materially have interfered.

It was not thus he had once spoken, no plea of household duties had been accepted, when Mary's companionship had been as necessary to him as Miriam's was now, though for different reasons.

Mary looked up from her work, and said, quietly, "Thank you, Miss Edgestone; but Cyril is right; I could not be spared from home for so long—not to-morrow, at least,—another time, perhaps."

"Oh, but I so particularly wished you to come to-morrow, because—because——." Here she stopped short, blushed crimson, and threw a shy, appealing look at her Aunt, who, with a peculiar smile, patted the young

girl's glowing cheek, and, to change the conversation, directed her eye-glass to the old portrait over the chimney-piece—the portrait of one, Cyril Thornton.

“That is a very fine painting,” she said, in the tone of a connoisseur, “very fine indeed—I have often admired it before—a family portrait, I presume?”

“Why, Aunt, of course it is,—your own eyes could tell you that; it is so like Mr. Thornton, it might almost be his portrait, only that he does not wear long hair and ruffles; just his eyes, and hair, and smile,—not the smile he has when talking to us, but the same he sometimes has in the pulpit.”

Miriam spoke softly—not quite in her usual light strain, with rapt eyes lifted to the faded canvas.

How grateful Cyril felt to the ancestor who had called up that look into his darling's face!

Mary's eyes were bent upon her work. There was a time, and not so long ago, when, nestling up to his side, she would have joined eagerly in his praise, looking up at him as Miriam did at the old picture; but she had learnt, among other things, to keep silence, and, communing with her own heart, to be still.

“The cavalier's dress dates some centuries back; I did not know your family was so old an one, Mr. Thornton. Any remarkable men among them? I have a weakness for family chronicles.”

Cyril, whose London career had taught him the value of a pedigree, was about to enter proudly upon his family history, when Hal, who had hitherto stood apart whistling to himself, with his hands thrust deep down into his trowsers' pockets, broke in impetuously.

“Remarkable, ma'am! I should say so, indeed! Why, our great-grandfather got the prize medal for the largest pig that was ever sent to market; he was painted on the spot; his portrait hangs over my bed; he was supposed to weigh——”

“Who?—the pig or the ancestor?” asked Mrs. Leigh, in a tone of the gravest interest, but a mischievous

smile curled the corners of her lips, and Miriam tittered audibly.

"The pig, of course!" answered Hal, with a gruff contempt that showed how little the ancestor weighed in his estimation when compared with a pig that won the prize.

Mrs. Leigh, highly amused, and unheeding the flush of shame that had risen to Cyril's brow, was turning once more to the young farmer, hoping to draw him out, when Mary, jumping up, hastily called the general attention to Miriam's favourite peacock just then stalking majestically below the window. When Mrs. Leigh turned with a laughing remark to Hal, both he and Mary had vanished, and Cyril, who had been on thorns, breathed more freely.

The day fixed upon for the long forest excursion rose clear, bright, beautiful, real lovers' weather without a cloud. At six o'clock Miriam usually, as Ruth used to say, "Such a lazy little lie-a-bed," was up and in the garden. When she met Aunt Emily at the breakfast table she threw her arms round her neck, whispering with an hysterical little sound that was between a laugh and a sob, "Oh! Aunty darling I am so happy—so happy." All the morning she was restless and excited, flitting in and out, dancing about her Aunt's arm-chair, giving her twenty kisses where she usually gave her one, but resisting all attempts made to chain her down to a chair even for five minutes. Now and then she would disappear, and when she returned with unnaturally flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, Aunt Emily would, say, with a very mischievous smile, "What, not got it yet off by heart, child?" and the child, looking very guilty, would crush something down into her pocket, and fall once more to kissing her Aunt by way of hiding her confusion. At dinner she found it very hard to sit still, and, eating nothing herself, thought the meal interminable.

"I am so glad," she said, "that Mr. Thornton is coming to fetch me for a walk, I always forget time

with him; and I so want the day to pass. Only three o'clock! Another whole hour before he comes!"

When she went up to dress she did not throw on her hat as she usually did without even a look at the glass; on the contrary, she sat down before it, and gazed at herself long and earnestly.

"Don't you think, Poynce," she said at last to her Aunt's maid, who was fastening up her curls, "that I am dreadfully sunburnt, and . . . not as pretty as when he saw me last?" She spoke hesitatingly, evidently hoping to be contradicted.

"Lor! miss; why, whatever put such a thing into your head?" answered Poynce, readily. "You're just ten times prettier, as my mistress and I were saying only this morning; and so some one else would say if he were asked."

Miriam blushed deeply, and hoped Poynce did not see it.

"But I am so freckled," she persisted, "and I am afraid I have got dreadfully fat. None of my London dresses will meet."

"Fat, indeed!" cried Poynce, in a tone of indignant remonstrance; "why, Mrs. Winsmore's maid said to me only yesterday, what a beautiful figure my young lady was!"

"Yes, when compared with her old one, who is as broad as she's long, I should think so, indeed," laughed Miriam.

"And, then," proceeded Poynce, who knew her duty too well to neglect any occasion for a little honest flattery, "you've such beautiful colours, and gentlemen do so like that! I am sure, as I was saying to . . ." Poynce had exhausted her small stock of country acquaintance, but, never at a loss, continued, after a moment's pause, which she converted into a cough, "as I was saying to myself not an hour ago, if *some one* was in love with you a month ago, he'd just go mad about you now."

Another blush, deep as the first; then a silence.

"Oh, there he is!" cried Miriam, suddenly. "I hear his step in the garden."

Poynce flew wildly to the window. "Lor! miss," she said, "how you did frighten me. I thought, to be sure——," here she broke off and added, contemptuously, with a toss of her head, "It's only Mr. Thornton, after all."

The time was when the Reverend Cyril Thornton, the great preacher, the handsome affable gentleman, was a very grand personage in Poynce's eyes; but as a prophet has proverbially no honour in his own country, poor Cyril had altogether lost caste since the day that Poynce had seen his parents, "mere farm-folks," as she said, "not so much better than herself for all the airs he gave himself and the fuss that was made about him."

When Mr. Thornton reached the cottage he found Miriam awaiting him in the flowering porch, and he thought he had never seen her look so lovely. She was most bewitchingly attired for her long forest excursion, not as Mary would have been, in a stout linen dress, large shapeless hat, and leathern boots with soles an inch thick, and a mile too large; no, her boots, with a pretence at substantiality, were the daintiest little things in the world—not made to be hidden, but to peep coquettishly from under the skirt, which, gracefully tucked up, showed them off to the best possible advantage. As for her hat, we can but say that it was worthy of the bright face beneath it. In her delicately-gloved hand she carried a stout stick, without which no town-bred girl fancies she can get through a country expedition. As soon as she saw Cyril she danced down the garden-path to meet him. "How glad I am you are come," she said, giving him her hand, and not attempting to withdraw it though he held it awhile in his, while he looked at her. "The day has seemed so dreadfully long; I really don't know what would have become of me if you had forgotten your appointment after all, No, there is nothing to wait for; Auntie does not come, she is afraid of so long a walk, and you must not go in to

her now, for she would keep you ever so long, and I couldn't bear it. So all the pretty things you have to say to her, you can keep until later, for you spend the evening with us, you know."

So saying, the wilful girl kissed her hand to her Aunt, who stood at the window nodding and smiling at them, and ran down the lane, and into the meadow, hiding behind the wall, to have the pleasure of jumping out at Cyril as he passed by.

"Why are you so grave, Mr. Thornton?" she asked, suddenly, looking up into his face which certainly wore a very subdued thoughtful expression. "Have you and Miss Roe had a quarrel?"

Cyril laughed outright. "I and Mary a quarrel! We had never such a thing in our lives; we understand each other too well for that."

"That's right," said the young lady, with an approving nod; "it must be so very unpleasant to quarrel, more especially for I——," she caught herself up and laughed. "But why then do you look so serious? I wish everybody and everything to be happy to-day; the birds are, and the flowers, and the insects—look how merrily they dance about in the sunbeams—and so am I!" She paused, then with a sly, upward glance at her silent companion, and a little reproachful pout, went on, "You don't ask me why I am so happy? and if you did I should not tell you—not just now, at least—later, perhaps," she paused again, blushing, and smiling to herself.

Cyril's heart gave a great throb; those smiles, those blushes, how doubly beautiful did they make the young face. He could hardly keep back the avowal that trembled on his lips, and which he had resolved should be made that day; but they were in a public pathway; he must wait until the shadow of the forest trees shuts them out from the rest of the world, and allowed them to forget that it held aught else but themselves and their love.

Cyril being unusually silent, Miriam had all the talk

to herself, and she made the most of her opportunity, her tongue running on as merrily as her little feet which flew rather than moved over the ground. She was full of reminiscences. "Do you remember," she said, the first time we met? I do so well. How Keeper frightened me" (here she stooped to pat the dog's big head) "that was the first time, too, that I ever saw Captain Hartwell; how strange it is to look back to the beginning of anything."

"Yes, it is strange," said Cyril, in a low, dreamy voice; "I, too, remember that day; you had a spray of jasmine in your bonnet."

"Had I?" said Miriam, looking up, with wondering eyes; "how odd that you should remember. I thought men never stooped to notice such trifles."

"There are things which, trifles in themselves, cease to be so when they become feelings."

"Yes, you are right," she said, very softly, and thoughtful and subdued she walked on for some time in silence.

Cyril looked at her with wonder almost equal to his love. Never had he seen her so soft, so tender, so undisguisedly fond, almost, forcing from him, by her innocent wiles, the confession he was so ready to make. Had Mrs. Leigh, he thought, as a woman of the world, anxious to bring him to the point, given her niece a hint to this effect? Six months ago he would have scorned himself for so unworthy a thought, now he felt pretty sure that Mrs. Leigh would be glad to secure him—the already famous preacher, with a fair position, and the prospect of a brilliant one in the future, was a catch even for the pretty niece of the general's widow. They had walked for some time under the high forest trees, through which the sun sent light and shadow, and the air blew cool and fragrant; then leaving the beaten track they had wandered off into fairy nooks and dells, where at every step Miriam stood still to wonder and admire. Now it was a tuft of moss which Cyril gathered for her, and which she pressed lovingly to her cheek, and played

with, and laughed over, as a child with some new toy. Now it was a squirrel who called forth a cry of delight, now a gay butterfly. "You must think me very silly, Mr. Thornton," she said, at last, apologetically, "but I have seen so little of the country. I always lived with sister Ruth in London, and we very seldom could leave town, because it cost so much. I remember once after I had been very ill, some one sent me a little plant, and it made me so happy, until it reminded me of the country, and gave me a great longing to get away from the dull, hot terrace, and then it made me cry. How long, long ago that seems now!"

Miriam had boasted of her walking powers, but they had not gone very far when she grew tired, and asked to turn back; and when they reached a green, mossy bank, by a purling stream, which went murmuring and dancing over the pebbles, clear as crystal, she sat down, and Cyril, as the best introduction to what he had to say, repeated in his deep, rich voice, some lines with which she had inspired him, and when, looking up at him with eyes full of a reverential light, she asked him whose they were. "Tennyson's, or Moore's, or Byron's?" He answered, smiling, that they were written by a friend of his to the woman he loved dearly, better than all else in the wide world.

She repeated the words after him, in a soft, low voice, so low as to be little more than a whisper. "How sweet to be thus loved—better than all else in the wide world—I wonder. . . ." Here she broke off, and looked down into the water, with eyes so wistful that Cyril's lips opened once more (though somehow he found it a far less easy thing to speak than he had supposed), but Miriam gave him no time. "I wonder" (but this was not what she had originally intended saying), "why people talk so much against love—it must be such a happy delightful thing!"

"And what is your idea of love?" asked Cyril, wishing to draw her out, and see how far her innocent affection would carry her. He had by degrees drawn nearer to

her, and was now so near that his elbows rested on the folds of her dress, and his cheek leaning on his hand, he could look up into her face, invested with a fresh charm, that of downcast lids and sweet thoughtful lips. There came over him a new sensation, that of possession; he felt something of the lordly satisfaction of an Eastern sultan, watching the airy graces of a lovely favourite, knowing that every charm, every grace, is his, and his only.

She sat very still, not daring, as he thought, to look round, as if conscious of his proximity; her colour coming and going, her eyes fixed upon a bunch of beautiful wild-flowers he had gathered for her, and which lay in her lap. She was evidently thinking over his words, for she said at last, with a mischievous little smile, though she spoke in all gravity,—“I know why you ask me that, because you think me incapable of love; but pray how are we poor women to prove our love? When we dress nicely to please you, you call us coquettes—when we laugh and tease you, because we know you like it, you call us heartless—and if we are quiet and simple and good, you call us dull and stupid—and get, oh! so dreadfully bored! There’s no satisfying you anyhow; so the best thing for us to do is to go our own way, and some day perhaps, when the hour of trial comes, of sickness or sorrow or loss, it may be given us to prove our love, and then you will never doubt it again.”

She was laughing, and the little flushed face wore a prettily defiant look, but there were tears in the downcast eyes, and one of these fell on the flowers that she was caressing one by one.

“Miriam,” said Cyril, in a low husky voice, “you are an angel—no man is worthy of you.”

“Oh yes, you all call us angels, and love us very dearly, and could not do without us, I know; but still you misjudge us—you know you do, and it is very wrong of you. I am not good, not half as good as sister Ruth. I like to have pretty things, and to see myself look

nice, and go to balls and theatres, but I would give them all up, I feel I would, if I loved some one very much, and I would not mind being poor, quite poor, and learning to cook, and having no servants, and waiting upon my husband myself, just to show him how bright a woman's love can make his home. Aunt always laughs when I speak so, and says that I am a silly child, and don't know what poverty is; but I do, quite well, for Ruth and I were poor; sometimes we had no money at all in the house, and it was quite a wonder when I had a new bonnet or dress—but I was quite happy."

"God grant you may always be so, but not in poverty or privation. The man who loves you will take your love on trust—he will read it in your eyes, or he is not worthy of you."

Cyril's voice was shaken with emotion; he spoke rapidly, he hardly knew what he said; he only knew what he had to say, what he longed to say, so that he might fold her in his arms—his love, his darling! but the words would not come.

Miriam had drawn down the corners of her lips with a very doleful look, and was pulling to pieces with angry impatience the flowers she had a moment before caressed. "But there is some one who won't believe in my love at all, and was often so jealous and unjust, particularly in London. Sometimes he would not come near us for days, because—because I wore a new dress and looked pretty—and others told me so besides him. It was very cruel, don't you think so, Mr. Thornton?"

"But did you never give him cause for jealousy? Remember there can be no strong love without it; and what may be to you a mere joke, may to the man who loves and trusts you be the ruin and misery of a lifetime."

"God forbid!" said Miriam, startled by the deep passion of her companion's tone; "but I don't think that Charles would break his heart about—even me, though he is always threatening to shoot himself.—There!" she cried, jumping suddenly up, her face all a-flame and

uncertain in her confusion, whether to laugh or cry. "I have told you my secret, after all—how stupid! And I meant it to be such a surprise, and not to let you know anything till he was here—but it's no good hiding anything now, and—Aunty will laugh at me so. Well, it is no such great harm, after all; for he will be here to-morrow, and then everyone will know."

As she spoke she drew a letter from her pocket, smiled down upon it, and then thrust it back.

Cyril recognised his friend Hartwell's handwriting.

"And now," she said, "please not to congratulate me, or say a word on the subject, for I could not bear it; but let us make haste home, for Aunty is waiting tea for us; and we shall be benighted, and have to sleep in the woods, and you will have to cover me over with leaves, as the robins did the babes."

The burden of her secret cast off, Miriam was quite herself again—her playful, merry, thoughtless self. She went dancing along the path, chatting gaily—now of the yellow ducklings—such darlings!—she had seen at the farm; now of a pic-nic they had had at Scarborough, where Char—Captain Hartwell—had proposed to her; now of the new dress that had that day arrived from London, and which was to be worn to-morrow. Then she hoped Mr. Thornton would perform the marriage-service; and she further hoped that he would come just the same to the cottage during the week he still remained; because Charles . . . Here she stopped short: but having got out the whole name, she did not retract it; on the contrary, she repeated, in a low, happy voice, "Charles liked him so much!"

They had now reached the stile leading into the field at the end of which lay the little garden of Beckham Cottage. With her foot upon it, Miriam paused, and, with a demure look, and in a tone that was meant to convey reproaches, said, "Why don't you tell me your secret, Mr. Thornton, as I told you mine? But I know it; I know it quite well, and so does Aunty and Charles."

You *are engaged to Miss Roe!* and we are all so glad, because we like her very much—at least Aunty and I do; and *he* will, I am sure, when he knows her.”

For the first time since her confession, she looked up at her companion, as if expecting an answer; but just then the sound of carriage-wheels was heard in the road beyond. Miriam gave a low cry; then, eager, breathless, her head bent forward, her hands clasped, listened intently. The sound ceased abruptly; the carriage had stopped: and Miriam, clearing the stile at a bound, was off, flying down the field, towards the garden-gate, which opened impetuously; and Cyril saw Charles Hartwell hurry forward to meet her with outstretched arms. There was a simultaneous cry of “Charles!”—“Miriam!” and the girl whose hand, in all the ardour of his love, he had never dared to clasp, was in another man’s arms, her own flung around his neck, giving herself up without shame or restraint to his caresses. He saw how the young man stooped to meet the lips raised to receive his kisses. After that he saw no more, for he had covered his face with his out-spread hands.

When Miriam, at last, remembered Mr. Thornton, she ran back to the gate to look for and call after him: she even, accompanied by Captain Hartwell, went as far as the stile; but he had disappeared. She was surprised, being quite unconscious that half an hour had elapsed since they had parted.

A peasant told her that he had met and accosted him; “But that he looked mighty strange, and did not seem to hear. He was walking from side to side, with his head on his breast; and if it hadn’t just been Mr. Thornton and a minister, he’d have said he’d taken a drop too much.”

The Captain indulged in a roar of laughter, and treasured up the accusation for much future quizzing of his reverend friend. Miriam’s sweet face looked troubled. “Perhaps Mr. Thornton was ill: he had been so silent during the whole walk.”

The next day, as soon as breakfast was over, the three walked down to the farm. They were met by Mrs. Thornton, who had evidently been crying her eyes out. Cyril, she told them, was gone. He had that morning had a letter summoning him back immediately to London.

Mrs. Leigh and Miriam expressed a polite regret; but the news did not much affect their spirits. The Captain alone looked grave; and, as soon as he found himself alone with Miriam, he asked her when Mr. Thornton first heard of their engagement.

"Only yesterday. I meant you to take him by surprise; but I let it out somehow."

The Captain dropped the subject: he had no desire to set the handsome young preacher before his darling's eyes in the interesting light of a broken-hearted lover; but he had certain very painful misgivings; and several times during that and many succeeding days he might have been heard to mutter, when alone, "Poor fellow! poor devil! confounded shame, that it was."

END OF VOL. I.

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